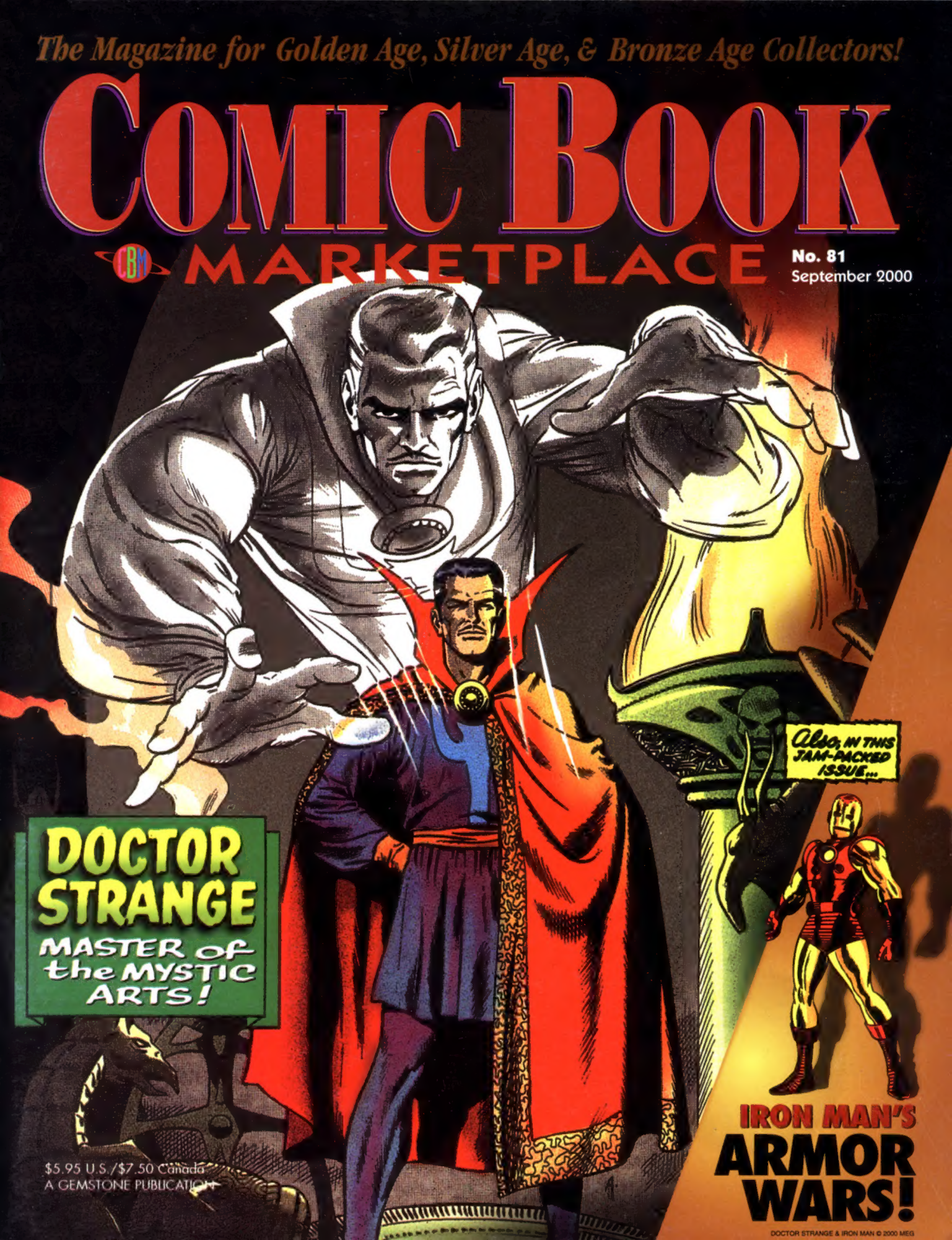
The Magazine for Golden Age, Silver Age, & Bronze Age Collectors!

COMIC BOOK MARKETPLACE

No. 81
September 2000



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ON THE COVER:
A closeup of the original art used on the cover of Doctor Strange #169 first published in the summer of 1968 (special thanks Arnie Sawyer Studios)

I Remember Shadizar...

By the end of the 1960s, I had become just a little disenchanted with comic books. Tower and ACG were dead, Archie and Harvey repetitive, and even my favorite company, DC, seemed to have lost vision. (We kept buying everything anyway though... just to keep our runs complete.) And Marvel? Well, I had a hard time relating to the Marvel of that period. I liked some of the art and a few of the writers. I also thought that many of the concepts were great. But nothing really rang my chimes the way it had at start of the decade.

Then in the Fall of 1970 something miraculous happened. It was a new Marvel title... called *Conan*. To say the least, it hit my brother and I between the eyes like a literary two-by-four and single-handedly brought back the passion for comics and the excited anticipation associated with patrolling the local newsstand for the next issue.

I don't know... I must have been in a void. I had heard of Robert E. Howard from all my sci fi and fantasy-reading friends, but never got around to reading any of the novels. That all changed suddenly when Marvel released the *Conan* comic book title. Suddenly, for the first time in my life, I was truly transformed into (gulp, dare I say it) a Marvel Zombie!!! (At least for one title.)

And everywhere I turned in the hobby, everyone else was talking about *Conan* too. In the fanzines it was the hottest topic of conversation that had hit the fandom scene in years. Everybody was hanging from issue to issue. Suddenly former collectors were coming back to fold. Adults were reading it... college students were reading it... high school and junior high students were reading it... and I was reading it too. (Even dealers got into the *Conan* collector's movement by trying to corner the distribution on issue #3.)

As the Conan comic books were published one by one, I became conversant in a whole new language of mythic proportion. Sword and sorcery, primordial heroism, and knock-your-socks-off action became the staple of my reading habit. To the uninitiated, "Devil-Wings Over Shadizar" was just another story. To me it was an elevating adventure into the highest place comics could go. (To this very day, "Tower of the Elephant" in #4 still brings a tear to my eye... and the art still takes my breath away.)

So last week or so, I got out my original issues of *Conan* that I bought from the stands way back when, and began to re-read them through the eyes of a jaded pentagenarian. You know what? Those first 11 issues or so are still, in my opinion, some of the finest comics ever published! (And that's not light praise either, since I figure I've read about a million of 'em.)

Somehow, miraculously, the brilliant scripting talent of Roy Thomas and the art-rendering genius of Barry Smith came together in one brief shining period at the dawn of the '70s and forged a high water mark in the history of comics that, to this day, I still compare everything else to.

So thanks Roy and Barry... for restoring my hope for the medium 30 years ago... and again just last week. Thanks for showing all of us the ideal that quality comics can reach, and how dedicated to that quality a writer and artist can be. Best,

Gary

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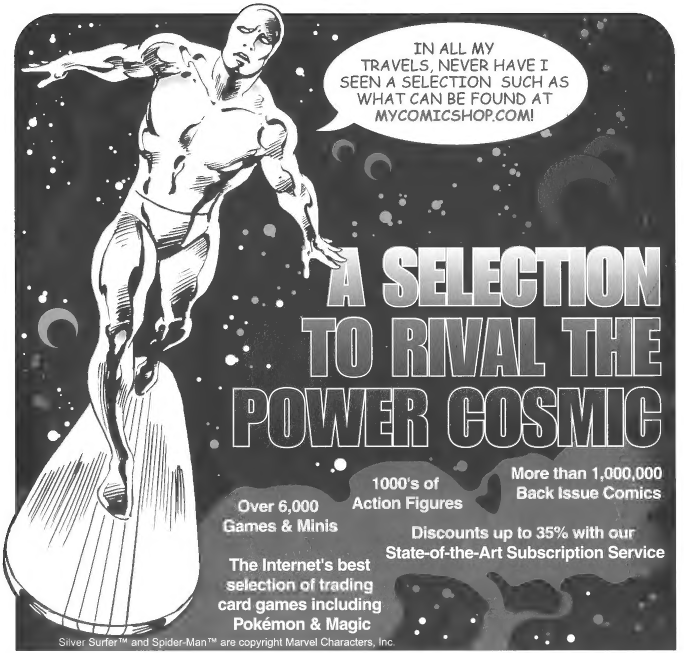
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The Amazing Amazon

Enjoyed Gerard Waggett's article in CBM #78 regarding the civilian adventures of The Amazing Amazon.

Some great observations about what her patriotic duds represented during that period in America's history. I had forgotten about that scary trio from issue #185. I know Mike Sekowsky was more involved with the direction of the character at that point. I wonder how much of 'Them' was the product of his input.

My first Wonder Woman comic was #202, the second part of that gorgeous Dick Giordano-illustrated team-up with Catwoman. Within my first months reading superhero comics I remember being confused by the dizzying direction of the character. I expected the breast plate, bullets, and bracelets… and instead Diana Prince was a 'mad mod'! Then, before I knew it, she was narrowly avoiding severe 'shark bite' and returning to her Amazonian heritage!

Chuck Brouillette, New York

Bravo Will Murray

Just re-read Will Murray's excellent article "Journey Into Strange Tales of Suspense to Astonish" in the October 1999 issue of Comic Book Marketplace.

First thing, I wanted to compliment him on the article. It not only was informative, but it really brought me back to my youth when I read so many of those Timely-Atlas classic monster comics. And the article reminded me that there's a comic book from that era that's eluded me through the years.

The comic is a monster story involving a giant hairy ape-like creature that if I remember correctly lurks ominously behind a wall. The creature has a particularly dumb looking almost sympathetic countenance. There are several explorers who are attempting to elude or flee from the creature. In the end the creature confronts the explorers and it turns out he is very intelligent and advanced and only wanted to help the explorers. The moral of the story is sort of, never judge a book by its cover.

I vaguely remember a cover and a similar splash panel showing the creature behind the wall with the explorers hiding in the foreground.

The book would have come out around 1959 and I'm pretty sure it was an Atlas/Marvel book, possibly with the grayish background you mentioned in your article. The monster may have had a goofy name.

Naturally, my parents got rid of all my comic books when I went to high school, but I've been re-collecting them as an adult. I haven't been able to purchase this one because I'm not sure of the title of the book or story.

Does this story ring a bell with any of your readers? Is it possibly something they might recognize and might be able to identify for me so that I could attempt to track it down from the comic book dealer I usually buy from?

I have my fingers crossed that some knowledgeable CBM reader can shed some light on this mystery for me. In any case, thanks to Will for writing such a great article. It's nice that people like Mr. Murray and CBM are helping to keep these stories alive.

Louis Antonicello, New Jersey

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From the desk of Roy Thomas

Want to thank you again for making certain I got copies of the two special editions of CBM. Just reading about the old Ajax-Farrell Publications of the 1950s (all of which I had at one time) was pleasure enough. Those Flame/Phantom Lady/Samson/Wonder Boy/Black Cobra (did the article-writer know that Black Cobra did wear his goofy cobra-shaped helmet in one shot—an early ad for Black Cobra that was changed when the comic actually came out?) stories inspired me circa '54 to write synopsis for literally a dozen or more stories about their heroes joined together in a group I called "The Crusaders of Justice." In fact, early on I even wrote Ajax a letter suggesting they make up a hero called Wonder Boy—and received back a nice letter saying they already had a hero by that name in the works. Of course, at that time, I had no idea that Wonder Boy had existed back in the '40s from the Iger shop.

Thanks, too, for the great coverage of that underrated artist, Ross Andru, with whom I had the pleasure of working at various times over the years, from X-Men to Superman… and of Mike Esposito, with whom I shared (back in the late '60s) many a poker game at Phil and Carol Seuling's Coney Island apartment.

We crazed comic-book historians have to stay together!

Roy Thomas, South Carolina

Took a while

Well, it took a while… but Wonder Woman finally became the focus of one of your issues, and for this fan, it was worth the wait. All of your contributing writers covered the most noteworthy aspects of the Silver Age Wonder Woman's mythos easily enough for the fan, and those who probably never looked at Wonder Woman twice to follow. Some highlights:

Gerard J. Waggett's article on the 'Diana Prince Era'—these are some of the most underrated comics ever! I hope this will encourage others to add them to their want lists, or entice DC to collect them in a one volume reprint. Waggett's "A League Of Her Own" piece was nice, too. These Schwartz team-up issues were a lot of fun to read when I was a kid.

John Wells' "Impossible Wonders"—excellent index work (I especially liked that modern era appearances were added to his research *(Continued)*

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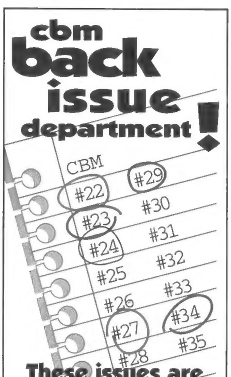

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too—even though CBM's focus is the 'past eras.')

Myls Putman's article, though in his words, not the 'ultimate fan-boy's discussion,' turned out to be just that. Highly enjoyable and humorous when dealing with the bizarre Wonder Woman, Steve, Mer-Man, Bird-Man "love stories." (But Kanigher "topped" those during his second run on Diana in the '70s with the revelation that Diana had a black twin sister. Well, you gotta give him an A for imagination at least!)

My only "complaint" was that Nolan's Notebook wasn't a Wonder Woman piece. Discussions of rarity and the like are usually the highlights of her column—and no superhero run is scarcer than mid-'50s Wonder Woman's I believe. It would have been interesting to read Michelle's view on this (but maybe you guys thought that would be overkill?) Still Michelle did acknowledge Diana several times in her article, while piquing some potential interest in Mary Marvel in me.

On another note, H. K. Widely reported that H. G. Peter drew Wonder Woman up to issue #97 (even some of your writers reported this). However, several other historians note that most of the 1950's Wonder Woman issues were drawn by Peter imitators (after he left or died?). In the Sensation Comics run, I can tell Peter drew up to #105, the next to last Wonder Woman issue. #106 is obvious to the eye, a "copy cat" artist. I can't figure out in my Wonder Woman collection when it happened in her own title yet, but when I do, maybe I'll write an article for Wonder Woman's 60th anniversary next year for your magazine.

Lastly, when you printed my letter back in CBM #71 (a request for the Wonder Woman syndicated strip of the '40s) Carl J. Horak answered my request the very next issue, and now I have copies in my collection. A belated but much appreciated thanks to your publication and Mr. Horak. Later...

Corey Holmes, New York

True Ditko story. Really.

I have a Steve Ditko story that I thought CBM readers would enjoy. It goes to show you just how small this world of comics (and the real world) actually is.

Back around 1992, I was invited by Jim Shooter to a conference of comic book retailers and distributors held at the offices of Valiant Comics in New York. We were asked to come in and get a sales pitch and give feedback on new upcoming Valiant releases. We were scheduled to have lunch and meet the members of the Valiant bullpen, get a bunch of freebies, tell them what we thought of their new projects and then be off.

When I walked into the offices, I was greeted by Jim Shooter, herded into a room with the other businessmen, and introduced to his staff. Then I heard Shooter say the words that made my jaw drop:

"And this nice fellow here is Steve Ditko."

STEVE DITKO!!? You've got to be kidding... is all I could think. I shook his hand and he was one of the most gracious men I've ever met. He proceeded to greet everyone and we doted over him like he was a god. One distributor, Walter Wang of Comics Unlimited in New York, is a collector of autographed baseballs. He has baseballs signed by all types of non-sports celebrities. He's such a nut about it that he always carried unsigned, mint baseballs with him whenever he'd travel. So Walter brings out this baseball and asks Ditko if he'd sign it for him. Well, being the gentlemen that he was, he obliged with a beautiful signature.

Suddenly everyone is looking for something for Ditko to autograph. And you have to realize, I can't believe that I'm actually meeting him! He had done some work for Valiant, but none of his comics were available in the offices at that moment. Then I reached into my pocket and took a crisp one dollar bill from my money clip and asked Ditko if he'd please sign it. He graciously obliged.

So now I had a Steve Ditko autographed one dollar bill. It was cool! But now for the rest of the story... After the Valiant business was over I had an appointment at the Marvel offices to discuss Marvel's appearance at the upcoming Chicago Comicon. I was rushing over to 386 Park Avenue South hoping not to be late. I ran past the guard in the lobby and asked for the Marvel Comics floor and was told "Tenth Floor." I get into the elevator and a pleasant looking gentleman is holding a brown bag lunch and a leather valise. Gosh, he looked familiar. Then it hit me. It was John Romita, Sr.

JOHN ROMITA!!? You've got to be kidding... is all I could think. What were the odds of running across Manhattan, meeting the original Spider-Man artist, and then rushing 30-something blocks just to get into an elevator with the artist who replaced the first guy? I was dumfounded, but I did muster the courage to intro-

duce myself and explain that I had just met Steve Ditko and I was such a big fan of both of them, and that I'd love to have him… SIGN MY SPIDER-MAN ONE DOLLAR BILL!!!

That's right. He autographed my one dollar bill right next to Steve Ditko's signature. It was absolutely the coolest feeling in the world to then walk into the Marvel offices and show everyone my Spidey dollar bill. Everyone was amazed to say the least.

But here's the sad postscript to this little story.

I brought the bill to San Diego the following year and got it autographed by then Spidey artist, Todd McFarlane. I got Stan Lee to sign it too. And then (gulp) I spent it.

THAT'S RIGHT. SOMEHOW IT ENDED UP IN MY MONEYCLIP AND I INADVERTENTLY SPENT IT!!! Aargghh! To this day my heart is still broken. True story. Really.

Gary Colabuono, Illinois

More Fun # 11

Have run into a minor problem, and Mr. Steve Borock at CGC recommended I contact you for a possible answer to my question. I would appreciate any information you could provide, or even a helpful reference if you could recommend one.

I recently flipped through my copy of More Fun #11, and happened upon a two-page Dr. Occult story by Leger & Reuths (Siegel & Shuster). It is certainly a "pre-costumed" appearance. I consulted the 30th Edition of the Overstreet Price Guide and I was surprised to find that there was no mention of this at all under the issue description for More Fun #11. Further, I was surprised to find that the information given in the descriptions for Comics Magazine # 1, & More Fun #14 seem to exclude the possibility of there being earlier Dr. Occult stories in the More Fun run. Perhaps it's just the wording, but the information given seems incomplete. Comics Magazine # 1 (May, 1936) is credited as the first Dr. Mystic (Dr. Occult) in the Overstreet Guide, with the description reading that… "Dr Mystic is not in costume but later appears in costume as a more pronounced prototype in More Fun # 14-17." This in and of itself is confusing, as New Fun # 6 (October 1935) is also credited with being the first Dr. Occult, but that's not part of my question.

The description for More Fun #14 (October 1936) suggests that this issue was Dr. Occult's first DC appearance, with stories continuing from the now defunct Comics Magazine title. That would make some sense, as Comics Magazine # 5 was dated September 1936, and More Fun #14 began the very next month. But then, what about my More Fun #11? Is the Guide only acknowledging Dr. Occult's very first appearance in Comics Magazine, and then his first costumed (i.e., first possible Superman prototype) appearance in More Fun #14? At the very least, it seems that the "1st DC appearance" under More Fun #14 is a little off, as there is clearly a two-page story in More Fun #11 (three months before MF #14, and only two months after Comics Magazine #1). If Dr. Occult is considered as such an influential character and prototype to Superman, why isn't there a more consistent record of his appearances in the early National Periodical publications?

Any help you can provide in sorting out the various Dr. Occult appearances would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

P.S. CBM is a fantastic magazine, please keep up the great work.

George Christopher, via E-mail

Well George, you've certainly done some homework on this topic. I think I can clear up some of the confusion for you by saying that in order to understand the often complex Dr. Occult chronology, one must differentiate between the so-called "Superman prototype/Occult in costume" stories and the "standard" Dr. Occult stories. Yes, Occult did start in #6… but the "Occult-in-costume/Superman prototype" stories only appeared as the five-parter "Koth and the Seven." Further confusing collectors is the fact that the first installment of this five-parter appears not in More Fun but in Comics Magazine #1… and the remaining four installments CONTINUE in MF #14-17. The reference in Overstreet is trying to say that the only MF issues that feature the good "Doctor O" IN COSTUME are issues #14-17. Hope that helps to clears that up for you. If you'd like more on the topic, see the article "DC Before Superman" in Overstreet #13 (1983).

Eric Blackmore writes

Greetings! There are four topics I would like to comment on, the first three are regarding CBM #79.

First: Dick Sprang. I feel deeply sad at his passing. To me he was the best Batman artist, especially when inked by Charles Paris. His art was always detailed and never static. Like Republic serials, his characters always seemed to

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be on the cusp of action. He outdid Kane, Robinson and Moldoff to become the premier Golden-to-Silver Age Batman artist. As a youngster, his Batman was the one I wanted to be with his powerful frame, keen mind and an expressive cape that put Neal Adams rendition to shame. The "Good Batman Artist" indeed!

Second: Captain Action. I loved Dave Blanchard's article. I wish I had written it! The Captain, Action Boy, Dr. Evil and the amphibious Silver Streak were the favorite toys of my youth and today as well. Although at first I would have him become all the different heroes, it wasn't long before the Captain and Company became my main focus as heroes. They were just too cool! Thank you, Playing Mantis for bringing back my favorite memories! As an aside, I'm always amazed how my favorite writers and artists were able to produce such a high volume of quality books with the constant pressure of deadlines hanging over their heads! Real-life heroes, all!

Third: CGC books. I'm speaking as a lifelong comics fan and collector, so bear with me. To slab or not to slab? I don't care! If I was in a position to have a slabbed book, I would break the seal, read, and savor the book… for that is the purpose for which it was created in the first place. The companies are businesses whose purpose is to make money, but we purchase them to read and enjoy. It is deceptive for any dealer to grade a book anything other than the grade it deserves. If the book has any attributes other than the stated grade, it is a great selling point that should be listed in smaller letters next to the grade. As I previously said, I personally don't care if it's slabbed or not but I wonder who really is paying to have the book encapsulated. I'm sure the dealer is not absorbing the cost alone but is passing the fee down to the consumer who, like me, may not care if it has been graded by CGC.

Fourth: When you said that your EC Tribute Issue (CBM #80) was going to be special, you weren't kidding! You gave me more, much more than my money's worth on this "keeper" issue. It's a cover-to-cover treasure! To be honest, I expected the same old information presented in the same old way, as I've seen in numerous magazines and books, but was I wrong! Fascinating interviews; fascinating articles! An EC goldmine of information! I could get a real feeling for what it must have been like to work for a man like Bill Gaines at 225 Lafayette Street during the New Trend days. He was obviously a man of integrity and generosity. The clincher for me came when he said (in the interview on page 89), "I always say those were the happiest days." And the end result showed in some of the best comics of ALL time! Thanks Russ Cochran, for making those EC classics available and affordable, and thank you CBM for this classy (and classic!) tribute!

Eric G. Blackmore, Tennessee

Reprint or Variant?

As someone who has collected comics since 1982, and who has worked as a comics retailer in the past, I was already familiar with the Marvel and DC reprints from the 1970s and early 1980s (particularly the Marvel issues with the variations on the normal cover price box and the DCs with the Whitman logos) even before your recent articles.

I agree with the statement made about many people not even realizing that these are reprints. Oftentimes you can find the Marvels sorted and priced with ordinary issues. I just recently picked up several Black Panther issues in a "complete set" bundle, and noticed that many of my Marvel Star Wars issues seem to be reprints (#7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 26-29).

I have wondered for quite a while now how I am supposed to price these reprints. Very few are specifically addressed in the Price Guide. The prime example where separate prices is noted are the Star Wars issues, yet Overstreet only lists prices for reprints of issues #1-9. How am I to determine the appropriate prices for later reprint issues of Star Wars, or for my other reprint issues?

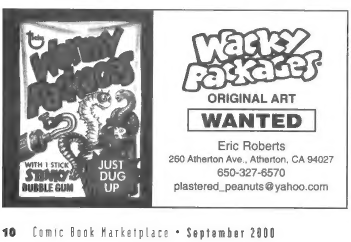
What is the general feeling in the marketplace in terms of these reprints? The old rule of thumb was that reprints were worth very little to nothing. However, if these issues' status as reprints is unknown to most dealers and buyers (and Overstreet does not distinguish them as reprints), is their value really any different from the "regular" issues? I'd be interested to hear from some CBM readers who are dealers in terms of how they handle these issues. Do they price them the same as the originals? Do they label them as reprints and price them significantly lower? Are the DC Whitman issues handled any differently from the Marvel reprints?

For that matter, what is the technical difference between a "variant cover" and a "reprint"? I've always assumed that a "variant" edition was a copy from the original print run (which was made with a different cover then the majority of said print run), while a "reprint" was always a copy printed sometime after the original print run. Yet some of these 1970's Marvel reprints may be falling into the "variant" cover category, and does the average comics collector really know the difference? One thing for certain is that the terms "variant" and "reprint" carry very different connotations. "Variant" seems to be something special, while "reprint" seems to carry an inferior status (at least in investment concerns).

My original concern for this issue came when I was completing an inventory of my collection and I came upon those Star Wars reprints. I wanted to be honest with myself in terms of their relative value, however the Price Guide was of no help to me. I ended up giving them an arbitrary $2 mint value for the time being (since Overstreet lists the reprint #1-9 issues at $4) until I can find a more definite "official" price for these issues. I like to lean towards the conservative estimate personally.

I hope that you will be able to print this somewhere in CBM. The variant price topic has been heating up lately (as new prices in Overstreet indicates as well as your own articles). I'd hope that this topic could finally be addressed as well (the handling/pricing of reprints not indicated in official price guides).

David Young, Florida



More on Qualified grades

Just read Richard Byard's letter in CBM #76 regarding CGC's Qualified grading. I also wondered why CGC doesn't "use the description 'Qualified' FAIR, page missing, otherwise VF" on these books. So I wrote to CGC, and asked them about it (and aren't ALL books a Qualified Mint, à la Keith Contarino's letter?). I received this e-mail from Steve Borock, Primary Grader, CGC:

"To determine the Qualified grade, a comic book must look much better than its 'technical' grade and the determination is solely at the discretion of CGC.

"A Qualified grade is for a comic book with only one defect; otherwise there would be no legitimate reason for it.

"The reason CGC does not list the Qualified grade alongside the "technical" grade as you suggest(ed), is because it would defeat the reasoning behind having the Qualified grade in the first place. Besides, it would be difficult, if not impossible to get a group of people to agree on how many points a particular defect should be valued. It is up to the buyer and seller to value the comic book with a Qualified grade based on the appearance of it and how much the "qualified defect" does or does not bother them."

Well, I have even less confidence in CGC now. Really, how would having two grades on the slab "defeat the reasoning behind having a Qualified grade?" I don't see it that way. I have never hated that type of grading, as long as the seller said up front "I grade (and price) it as a VG, but without the loose centerfold it's a Fine +."

Isn't it CGC's job to "agree on how many points a particular defect should be valued?" Isn't that what they do with every comic they grade? If they're the "grading standard" for the industry now, why can't they determine how these defects might lower a book?

I feel that one of the reasons they won't include two grades on a Qualified book is money/income, plain and simple. You'd have less people sending in their Poor and Fair books if it actually said Poor and Fair on the slab. All that matters is that the sellers can say "Near Mint," even if in the small print it says "oh, by the way, it's missing a story page."

I would be more willing to accept CGC if they would do two things: include the actual grade alongside the Qualified grade, and stop slabbing modern comics! NM Spawn #1 sells for $90 on eBay? To quote my new favorite letter writer, Keith Contarino, that "makes me regurgitate and laugh at the same time!"

Stu Cathell, Washington

Rolf writes

Just reread Michelle Nolan's ACG Romance article from CBM #77. You asked if anyone had certain issues of Confessions of the Lovelorn and My Romantic Adventures. I have the following: Confessions of the Lovelorn #83, and My Romantic Adventures #113. Let me know how I can help. (Really enjoyed your article BTW!)

Rolf Gerdau, Nebraska

Clearing up a mystery

Hope this will clear up a minor mystery and correct some misinformation presented in CBM #79. In the "Comic Files" column it was stated that there were four issues of Out of This

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World Adventures pulp/comic. There are, in fact, only two issues. The number of issues becomes confusing because both issues were reprinted in Canada a few months after the US issues appeared. The reason the writer has never seen Vol 2 #1 (reprint of first issue) is that it is an exact reprint of both fiction and comic insert.

Further, the Canadian #2 issue has a different comic section than the US #2. The text fiction contents are identical.

CBM readers might also be interested in Avon's Pioneer Western pulp/comic dated December 1950. This has Geronimo #1 as an insert and is not listed in Overstreet.

Harold Forman, Pennsylvania

Is it a variant?

For the Edgar Allan Poe in the comics article, please add "Famous Tales of Terror" by Edgar Allan Poe which ran in Yellowjacket Comics, starting, I think, in #4, December 1944, with "The Fall of the House of Usher"—art by Gus Schrotter. It's not in #5, but returns in #6, December 1945, with "The Tell Tale Heart"—art by? Then the feature simply becomes "Famous Tales of Terror" with #7 (January 1946) and features an "ancient witch" as a narrator for more generic horror stories.

Regarding Michael Williams Love Romances #97: if the blacked out circle is covering a 10¢ price, then he does have a cover variant.

Jim Vadeboncoeur, Jr., California

Must have loved it too

Greatly enjoyed Dave Blanchard's article on the DC Captain Action comics of the 1960s. I was one of those kids that had all the costumes and the dolls and the equipment, and loved the comic book

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Someone at DC must have loved it too. because in a pair of stories in "The Adventures of Superman" (#533 and 538) back in 1996, Karl Kesel and Stuart Immonen brought back an element of the Captain Action mythos from the earlier comics. Although no one ever mentioned it outright either in the stories or in the letter columns, issue #533 (which guest-starred the Flash's grandson Impulse) found Jimmy Olsen and his then-girlfriend Dana visiting the Metropolis Museum of Art, where they find four coins in a display case—the coins with images of Mercury, Zeus, Hercules and Heimdall. The character Dana says, "I've heard of these coins… they're supposed to grant their possessor the power of the gods that appear on them!"

In issue #538, Dana (who apparently is obsessed with Superman, and was only dating Jimmy Olsen to get close to the Man of Steel) has stolen the coins from the museum, and dressed in a green, purple and white costume, bills herself as Superwoman. Naturally, they get into a super-fight, and at the story's end "Superwoman" has apparently died in an explosion in Metropolis Harbor. Her body, and the coins, have disappeared.

The character came back a few times after that, and was then named "Obsession." I haven't been able to figure out her later appearances (the confusing continuity of the Superman titles over the past five years makes it tough to plow through the back issues). Thanks!

Jim DeLorenzo, Pennsylvania

A different Marvel perspective

Really enjoyed the article some months ago, by a collector who had amassed almost all of the comics put out in a particular month in the late 1950s. I have found that the CBM, Gerber indexes, and eBay have expanded the ways in which I can enjoy my hobby. I'd like to share another way which has increased my enjoyment of the hobby.

Over the years, I have frequently read and reread my complete sets of Silver Age Marvel. However, as I began collecting only certain titles in 1965, I always felt I missed out on the wonder and excitement of that growing Marvel Universe. So, a couple of years ago, I decided to reread the entire Silver Age Marvel set, chronologically. To date, I'm up to 1965, as I manage to find time to read about two books a night. I began by reading what few Atlas books I had from the '50s, then proceeded on to the pre-Marvels, of which I have all except a dozen or so.

As I read on into the "Marvel Age" I noted a few items of interest. Although the "superhero" age began with FF #1 there were no less than 38 other "pre-Marvel" and western titles from that month until FF #4 came out (not counting romance books). Indeed, with the coming of the Hulk, I still felt like I was in the pre-Marvel Age. In fact, it wasn't until the cover date of September 1962, that superhero books first outnumbered the fantasy titles, with FF #6, TTA #35, Hulk #3, and JIM #84. This was also about the time that Marvel started to colour its characters normal colours, instead of those wonderful red, orange, and blue faces

By late 1963, the company was proclaiming immodestly, that this was indeed the Marvel Age of comics. And in order to grab some of the spotlight from its more distinguished competition, it sadly felt it necessary to smother its cover art with screaming, in-your-face balloons, often stating the obvious. Now, *(Continued on page 73)*

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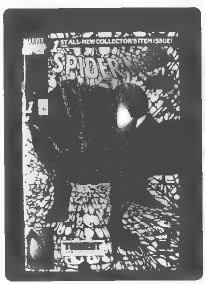

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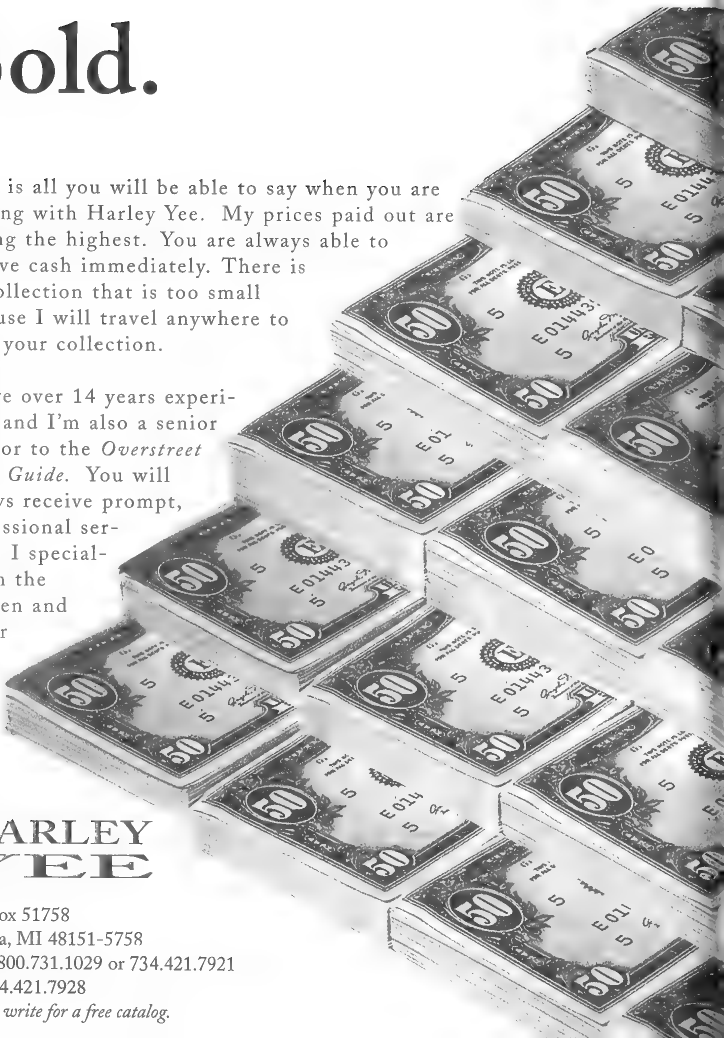

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Marvelous Maneely!

By Pat S. Calhoun

Of all the tragedies that have befallen the comics industry the untimely death of Joe Maneely looms as one of the largest. He was really good, really fast, and versatile. He died in a way as gruesome as the horror stories he illustrated so magnificently: in a fatal fall off a Long Island commuter train This was in 1958: he was thirty two years old.

After growing up and going to art school in Philadelphia, Maneely's work began appearing in comics—including Hillman's *Airboy*—in the late 1940s, but it was while working for Stan Lee at Atlas in the "pre-Marvel" days of the early 1950s that his style matured. Lee and Maneely worked well together, and the vast majority of his art appeared on and in Atlas titles.

Astonishing #7 (December 1951) is an early Maneely classic, with Joe providing a lurid cover and illustrating two stories inside. "Nightmare" is a seven-page exercise in psycho-horror, as a young woman has a terrifying dream where her husband's old flame shows up at their third anniversary party and seduces him and persuades him to murder his wife. But the plot gets desperately deeper when she wakes to find it is the morning of the party and everything goes just as she had dreamed. After a couple of loops of that she is ready to snap…

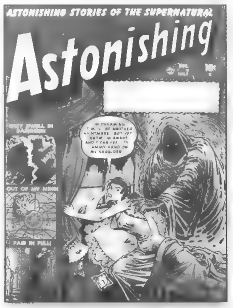
The second Maneely yarn closes the book, a six-page sci-fi epic, "Out of the Darkness." After the atomic war of 1999 contaminated Earth people moved underground to survive, but after 2000 more years they began giving birth to blind rat-like babies, and their chief scientist concludes that they must reclaim the surface world or be overtaken by their rodent progeny. However, they find the surface to be inhabited by dinosaur-like monsters who are resistant to their atomic ray blasts. There's scant suspense as the scientist has them construct bows and arrows to fight the beasts, but it's a fun read anyway and Joe's pictures yield potent pleasure.

This ish also includes a good horror story that was one of John Romita's first Atlas efforts. What a team Marvel-Atlas was building back then!

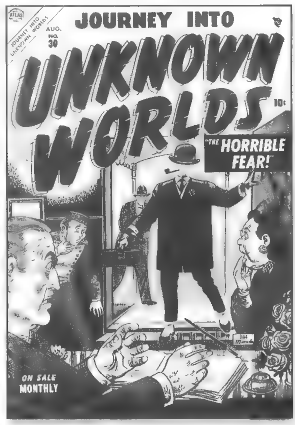
Adventures Into Weird Worlds #3 (March 1952) features an outstanding Maneely cover; plus he not only drew the story that goes with it but wrote it as well! "The Thing That Waited" has a dying Yankee fighter pilot over Korea discover that aliens have invaded Earth and—disguised as people—are about to launch their final takeover. There's a political twist ending that has been done many times before but still packs some punch especially when combined with the luminous intensity of Maneely's art.

This issue contains a second intriguing political parable, "The Quiet Men," where the ship that dropped the first cosmic bomb and began the war that destroyed Earth becomes a "flying Dutchman" of space, mystifying aliens as it drifts by on its ghostly course. Also therein is another tale of interplanetary invasion by beings that take the shape of humans, "The Empty City." It's nothing surprising, but it's readable and well-drawn.

Our next "Marvelous" Maneely masterpiece is the cover to *Adventure Into Weird Worlds* #27 (March 1953). This castle of horror scene shows Joe's ability to distill narrative into a vivid image. Although he didn't draw any of the stories, there's some incredible art inside, including work by two more towering giants, Matt Fox and Robert Q. Sale.

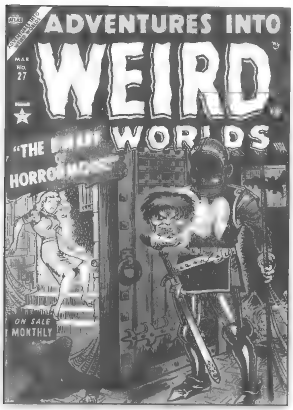


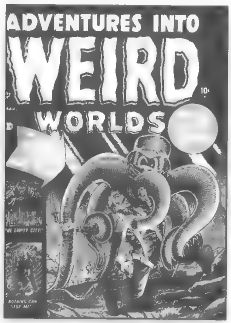
***Astonishing* #7 (Dec 1951) features one of Joe Maneely's first Atlas covers—on an issue that also contains two stories drawn by him**



On the cover of *Journey Into Unknown Worlds* #30 (Aug 1954), the invisible man checks into a posh hotel, much to the consternation of the clerk, the bellboy, and an aghast customer

In mid-1954, Atlas began toning down their covers in preparation for the brave new world of censorship that was due to take over after the Senate investigations issued a "clean up or else" ultimatum. But Maneely could still turn out powerful covers, as he did for *Journey Into Unknown Worlds* #30 (August 1954). A more psychological approach was applied inside and out. Joe's cover focuses on the facial reactions of those around the invisible man. Inside, the new trend is exemplified by "The Madman" about a battle-scarred Navy captain who's still living in fear of a Jap attack while his greedy relatives are trying to get him certified as insane. But on the day they succeed the long-dreaded assault begins. . It's a winner, handsomely drawn by Mort Lawrence.





Atlas ran into problems in 1957 when publisher Martin Goodman attempted an end run around his distributor that backfired and forced them to cancel most of their titles and sever relationships with their creators. Based on the evidence of *Tales of the Unexpected* #22 (February 1958), Maneely ended up at DC. He illustrates a yarn in that ish, a book made even more Marvel-like by having a monster cover and story by Jack Kirby. But this was just before his fatal accident.

Be that as it may, it is Maneely's Atlas work that's most memorable. Stan Lee once said that "Joe was so fast and so good we could have just about put out a line of books drawn solely by him." This look at some of his fantasy art only hints at his output; he was also adept at war, western, humor, and historical adventure. While it might be fun to speculate about the wonderful work he could have done on pre-hero Marvel monsters and even the superheroes; it is the work he did do that will endure. He was one of the shining stars of the pre-Code era, working for what I feel is the greatest company… during the greatest era of comics!

A severed head, an animated suit of armor, a rat, a bat, skeletons, and spider-webs in a creepy castle… all were part of *Adventures Into Weird Worlds* #27 (Mar 1953)

Maneely drew a spooky alien monster cover for "The Thing That Waited," a tale that he authored as well as illustrated in *Adv. Into Weird Worlds* #3 (Mar 1952)

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Osculations of Obscurity

More Adventures in Little-Known Romance Comics (PART II)

By Michelle Nolan

In the previous installment dealing with obscure osculations (*CBM* #80), otherwise known as the art of kissing, we touched on several of the least-known romance comics of the 1950s.

I didn't want you to think I'd "kissed off" other relatively unknown titles, however. So here we go, delving into the mysteries of those multi-company groups known as Artful/Harwell, Youthful/Trojan/Ribage, Story/Master/Merit, and Gilmor/Stanmor/Key.

These companies are all much better known for publishing many of the weirdest, wildest, and downright wackiest horror comics of the pre-Code era. I don't pretend to know everything about the connections between these obscure romance publishers, but I do have many wonderful examples of their work.

All told, these four publishers produced a total of 117 known romance comics ranging from late in 1949 to early in 1956—coinciding with the years when the romance comics were most popular. Did you know that at least 56 titles and 290 issues of romance comics appeared every year over that eight-year span?

Let's start with Youthful/Trojan, since this is the best known of the four groups (or at least I think it is). This group's titles include *Youthful Romances* #1 (September 1949) through #18 (July 1953), *Youthful Romances* #5 (September 1953) through #9 (August 1954), *Youthful Love/Truthful Love* #1 & 2 (May & July 1950), *Youthful Hearts* #1 (May 1952) through #3 (September 1953), *Daring Confessions* #4 (November 1952) through #8 (October 1953) and *Daring Love* #15 (December 1952) through #17 (April 1953).

By the way, Youthful's version of *Daring Love* is not to be confused with the highly collectible Gilmor one-shot *Daring Love* #1 (October 1952), which featured Steve Ditko's first published work.

To be honest, Youthful/Trojan produced some of the ugliest covers and art in comic history. Poses were awkward, to say the least. Stories were sometimes so bad they hurt.

For example, *Truthful Love* #2 (July 1950) has artwork by Walter Johnson and Howard James that I can truthfully say is among the worst I've ever seen in comics. It also has a bizarre house ad with the covers of *Youthful Love* #1 (May 1950) and *Youthful Romances* #5 (April 1950), saying "Watch for the next issues!"

Not only are these the past issues, but here we have an example of a comic that had just changed its title from *Youthful Love* to *Truthful Love*—in huge letters on the cover, yet—telling the reader to watch for the next issue under its old title! What were these editors smoking? We don't want to know!

Youthful Hearts #1 (May 1952) does a lot better in the art department, with stories by Harrison/Bache, Goldfarb/Baer, a very young Doug Wildey (of *Jonny Quest* TV fame, among others) and the one clinker—a truly horrendous job, worthy of any third grade class, by one Stephen Kirkel. The Wildey piece, with a nifty splash page of a circus girl about to leap through a ring of knives, is cool work.

The early issues of *Youthful Romances* (known as *Youthful Love Romances* at the start) are just awful. This title was not missed when it became a victim of the "Love Glut" with #5 (April 1950). Like so many publishers during the Love Glut era, Youthful resumed publication of *Youthful Romances* in 1951 with #6 (February 1951). This issue includes one story that looks as if Wonder Woman artist H. G. Peter had an imitative admirer, sort of like "The Holiday Girls Go Romantic." Wally Wood, who did some wonderful work for Youthful's *Captain Science* title of the same era, looks as though he had a hand in the cover of *Youthful Romances* #8 (August 1952).

Youthful's weak art and period-piece stories, which included supposedly real-life stories of famous pop crooners, all continue in *Youthful Romances* through #14 (October 1952), when the title did one of the most confusing switches any comic book detective ever had to sort through. Pix-Parade, the sub-publisher of *Youthful Romances*, changed the title to *Daring Love* with #15 (December 1952), but the *Youthful Romances* title and logo continued exactly the same under new publisher Ribage with #15 (January 1953).

Romantic Love #9—"A Realistic Comic," is a classic pre-Code example of clever layout (newspaper want ads) and seductive posture

You would think this would be enough to confuse the postal authorities, but they may have caught on, for *Youthful Romances* continued through #18 (July 1953)—the fourth issue under the Ribage indicia—before changing to the correct #5 (September 1953), which features a full inside front cover house ad for Master/Merit's *G.I. Jane* #2. Ribage, then, should be listed under the Master/Merit folks (see below).

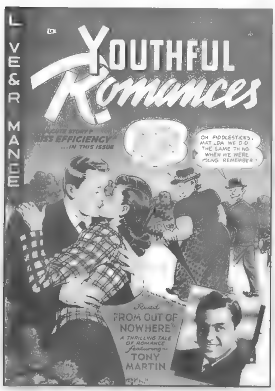
Not only that, but *Youthful Romances* #5 has a story entitled "Dangerous to Kiss!" with lettering and art straight out of an American Comics Group title such as *Lovelorn*. Apparently, somebody got signals crossed at the art shop! Or perhaps ACG rejected that story.

Youthful Romances contained weak art and period-piece stories... which included supposedly real-life stories of famous pop crooners. Ultimately the title went through one of the most confusing evololutions of any romance comic book

A. C. Hollingsworth contributed a neat story to *Youthful Romances* #7 (February 1954), which also features one of the all-time great whimsical romance covers. What used to be called in pre-politically correct days "an old battle axe" and her Milquetoast-ish husband are strolling along while watching a young couple kiss. "What's come over young people these days—kissing right out there in public!" she says. He responds, "Oh, fiddlesticks, Matilda, we did the same thing when we were young, remember?"

The more things change...

Moving over the Artful/Harwell, this is the company that was bought out by Ajax and Charlton at the end of 1954. Four highly collectible digest-sized comics, *Honeymoon Romance* #1 and 2 and *Confessions of Love* #1 and 2, appeared from Artful dated April and July 1950, but the "Love Glut" of that year may have contributed to their failure—and their ensuing scarcity. I've never been fortunate enough to find any of the four.


LOVE & ROMANCE
YOUTHFUL Romances
OH, PODGETSKY! WHAT CAN WE DO TO MAKE THE KISS WHICH WE BEING FOUND REMEMBER
FROM OUT OF NOWHERE
TONY MARTIN

Confusing fans for years... Pix-Parade changed Youthful Romances to Daring Love with #15 (Dec 1952), yet incredibly the Youthful Romances title and logo continued unchanged under the new publisher (Ribage) with #15 (Jan 1953)!

Artful's regular romance comics history began with *All True Romance* #1 and *Dear Lonely Heart* #1, both dated March 1951. For unclear reasons, the second issues of each did not appear until October, 1951. After that, *All True Romance* was published regularly through #20 (December 1954), when Harwell, otherwise known as Comic Media, sold the rights to Ajax. The reason that Ajax started with #22 apparently was that *All True Romance* had two #7 issues in September and November 1952, with the first dated November inside.

Dear Lonely Heart ran through #8 (October 1952), then was resumed by Harwell under the title *Dear Lonely Hearts* with #1 (August 1953) and ran through #8 (November 1954) before also being sold to Robert Farrell's Ajax line.

That adds up to 40 Artful/Harwell books, most of which have nice art (some of it looking as though it came from the Iger shop) and emotion-drenched stories.

Dear Lonely Heart #1 (March 1951) has a startling bondage splash page for the crime-romance story "So This is Love!" I'm sure if the good Dr. Fredric Wertham had seen this, he would have prominently featured it in *Seduction of the Innocent*. The page is unsigned, but it's typical Iger shop type work, similar to stuff seen in Ajax and Superior titles. In all honesty, I can't imagine any parent that may have seen this reacting with anything other than dismay.

Dear Lonely Heart #2 (October 1951) has a similarly shocking "Little Abner" type splash for a story entitled "The Good Looker An' Me!" This one ends "Ohhh... Yore crushin' me... But don't stop, darlin'... Don't ever stop!" Indeed!

The second incarnation of this Harwell title, changed slightly to *Dear Lonely Hearts*, features a lot of nice art by Kenneth Landau, Bill Discount, Marty Elkin, and others. For that matter, all the Comic Media titles of various genres are well worth looking into. Interesting, in *Dear Lonely Hearts* #6 (June 1954), there's a Harwell house ad including a comic book title called *Little Amigo... The Original Hot Tamale*! No one has ever discovered any copies of this politically incorrect title! Was it published under another title? If you have any ideas about this, I hope you'll be sure to let us know via *CBM*.

Story/Master/Merit was the firm that has become infamous for mis-dating all of its March 1955 issues as March 1954, thereby making the Comics Code Authority seal look totally out of place on a couple of issues. The Code Authority seal did not appear until comics dated February 1955 at the earliest. By the way, has anyone ever seen a comic with the date of January 1955—either monthly or bimonthly—with a Comics Code symbol?

This firm or firms published the same title two different times under the same logo. The first series of *Romantic Hearts* ran from #1 (March 1951) through #10 (October 1952) and the second series ran from #1 (July 1953) through #12 (July 1955).

However, as noted already in this article, the eight Ribage issues of *Youthful Romances* should be included as Master/Merit issues. It's odd, however, to see a comic book change ownership but look exactly the same.

Romantic Hearts #6 (February 1952) has a funky cover in which a cheerleader is kissing a basketball star, who responds by saying "Being hugged by you is even better than winning the game!" To which a second woman, a brunette vixen, thinks to herself, "That little cheerleader is not as innocent as she looks. I'll get to him yet no matter how bad I have to be!"

Yes, indeed… it's a 3-pointer from the corner!

The first incarnation of *Romantic Hearts* was published by Story Comics; the second series was produced initially by Master Comics. These are good period pieces, even though the art is grossly uneven. They're fun to read and the second series, especially, is easy on the eyes. The last issue, the post-Code #12 (July 1955), is published by Merit Publications.

Finally, let's look at the puzzle that is Gilmor/Stanmor/Key, published by Stanley Morse.

This company's first romance effort is perhaps the most collectible romance comic of all, *Daring Love* #1 (October 1952), with the Ditko debut and the "roll in the hay" cover. This title became *Radiant Love* with #2 (December 1953) through #6 (August 1954), apparently because of the conflict with Youthful's *Daring Love* #15-17 (December 1952 through April 1953), even though the Youthful title had been discontinued.

At the same time, Gilmor produced *Tender Romance* #1 (December 1953) and #2 (February 1954), which became *Ideal Romance* with #3 (March 1954) through #8 (February 1955). At that point, the title became *Diary Confessions* #9 (May 1955) through #14 (April 1956), when the Gilmor/Stanmor folks went out of business.

As I have said before, if there is any comic that once existed but no longer exists because no issues have survived, my nominations would be *Diary Confessions* #13 (which would be either January or February 1956). I own *Diary Confessions* #9, 10, 11, and 14 and Southern California indexer Dan Stevenson owns #12 (November 1955), but to the best of our knowledge, no copy of *Diary Confessions* #13 has ever been found.

I would really love to solve this mystery. Can any CBM reader help with this one?

The Gilmor titles are a lot of fun, with numerous different art styles, apparently from a mix of shops and artists. I don't have all of them, but it seems as though no two issues are alike. I believe I've seen some of the stories reprinted by Ajax and Superior.

Tender Romance #2 (February 1954) has a stunning story entitled "Ugly." The plot is the cliché of the blind man who regains his sight and continues to love a homely girl, but the execution is little short of daring. I can't imagine this rarely-seen little five-page epic (signed by Sal Trapani) would have come close to passing the Comics Code a year later.

The stories in *Diary Confessions* #10 (July 1955) were at least partly reprints of tales less than a year old. Interestingly, *Diary Confessions* #14 (April 1956), the last known issue, still carries "Formerly Ideal Romance" in the indicia even though the change was made more than a year earlier.

Over the years, I've located 75 of the 117 issues referred to here. For the most part, they're not great comics, and you probably won't want them all. But a few representative issues should be in any romance collector's collection.

Remember, you can't get enough examples of obscure osculation!

Romantic Hearts #6 (Feb 1952) features classic & highly collectible pre-Code cover dialogue… "That little cheerleader is not as innocent as she looks. I'll get to him yet no matter how bad I have to be!"

Michelle Nolan is a nationally recognized collector and researcher of comic books from 1940s through the '60s. She has one of the most extensive collections of 1950s comic books in the United States and has contributed volumes of data to the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide.

A book could be written on the evolution of Iron Man's armor design, beginning with the first Jack Kirby conceptual sketch that appeared as the cover to *Tales of Suspense* #39, to the radical Steve Ditko redesign a year later and Don Heck's many subsequent readjustments to that version, stretching all the way through the innumerable permutations down to the present day.

Up until now, one fact has stood unchallenged: That Jack Kirby alone designed the prototype gray armor.

A recent conversation with Mark Ellis, former publisher of Millennium Comics, caused me to rethink this bit of prevailing wisdom.

According to Mark, who employed Heck and got to know him pretty well, Heck recalled complaining to Stan Lee early in the genesis of Iron Man that Jack Kirby's cumbersome suit was too difficult to draw and offered to redesign it. Lee told him to give it a try, but the resulting sketch—now apparently lost—failed to convince Lee that Heck had formulated a superior Iron Man to Kirby's.

It's not clear where in that genesis this might have occurred. Heck drew the origin story without Kirby, despite what certain reprint credits say. The original story is credited to Heck alone, and Heck supports this.

"If you look at the thing," Heck pointed out, "it listed that Kirby laid out the first Iron Man story, which was *Suspense* #39. Which is not true. Kirby did #40. I think he did the layouts on that. But you'd have to see the layouts to appreciate it, because a lot of times—which was fine, because he wasn't getting paid that much for it—it would be almost like what Ditko did sometimes: stick figures. The reason Kirby designed the character is because he was in the city, and the covers were always done first.

"Those layouts were executed later, but Heck, who was known to open his Marvel scenes by having the Iron Man silhouette, which was unique. In this case, the cover came first because the concept art served as the cover."

Heck once interviewed Heck and he had never mentioned wanting to impose a different vision of Iron Man. He did say that the main reason Steve Ditko and not Heck himself designed the second version of Iron Man despite Heck's experience with the character was because he rarely went into the city to pick up work. Thus, it fell to Ditko.

Along that line, Heck told me, "If I happened to have walked in when they were changing the costume, I would have designed it at that point. If I had gone in there with no sleep, God knows what it would have looked like."

All this caused me to grab my *Marvel Masterworks* edition of the early Iron Man adventures in search of answers.

I'd long been confused by these early stories, which alternated between Heck and Kirby drawing them. The armor never seemed consistent to me, even as a kid.

Nothing better exemplifies this than a comparison of the covers to *TOS* #43 and #45, drawn by Kirby and Heck respectively. The Iron Man pose is nearly identical on both—the Golden Gladiator facing off against a live Kala. One of the Netherworld and Jack Kirby respectively in hilarious parody.

Distinct differences are displayed. The Kirby Iron Man sports a helmet shaped like a bullet set in its shell, with wide eyeholes and an open metal mouth. In the Heck version, the eyes are deeper, like the eyesockets of a skull, the mouth slit grilled, while his interpretation of the headpiece is distinguished by a jutting jaw. Heck's armor is also studded with innumerable seam rivets.

I went back to the cover of *TOS* #39. There, Iron Man does possess a chin, not to mention a neck and trunks. So why did Kirby typically draw him bullet-headed and skirted in later episodes? Did he forget these key design elements? Or was he modifying his character as he went along?

Either explanation struck me as equally plausible. Kirby was known for winging it and was frequently forgetful or unconcerned over design continuity matters. Iron Man's shoulder antenna pops in and out of existence from issue to issue, for instance.

But the answer, as I found, was far more complicated and intriguing, as it gives a startling insight into the origins and development of Iron Man as a concept.

First, it must be understood that while Jack Kirby created Iron Man, his efforts began and ended with the cover design. Writer Larry Lieber and artist Don Heck, under the guidance of editor Stan Lee, fleshed out the character's origin, among other things. The man behind the armor, Anthony Stark as well as his background, Kirby had nothing to do with it, according to all everyone involved.

"Stan called me up and told me that we were going to have this character and the character's name was Iron Man," Heck recalled. "And his name was Tony Stark and the way he was wounded in Vietnam, it was just a synopsis over the phone. We didn't actually sit down and work out the character and the rest. I knew what the cover looked like because I got the cover in the mail."

In fact, Heck claimed a very specific motivation for Stark.

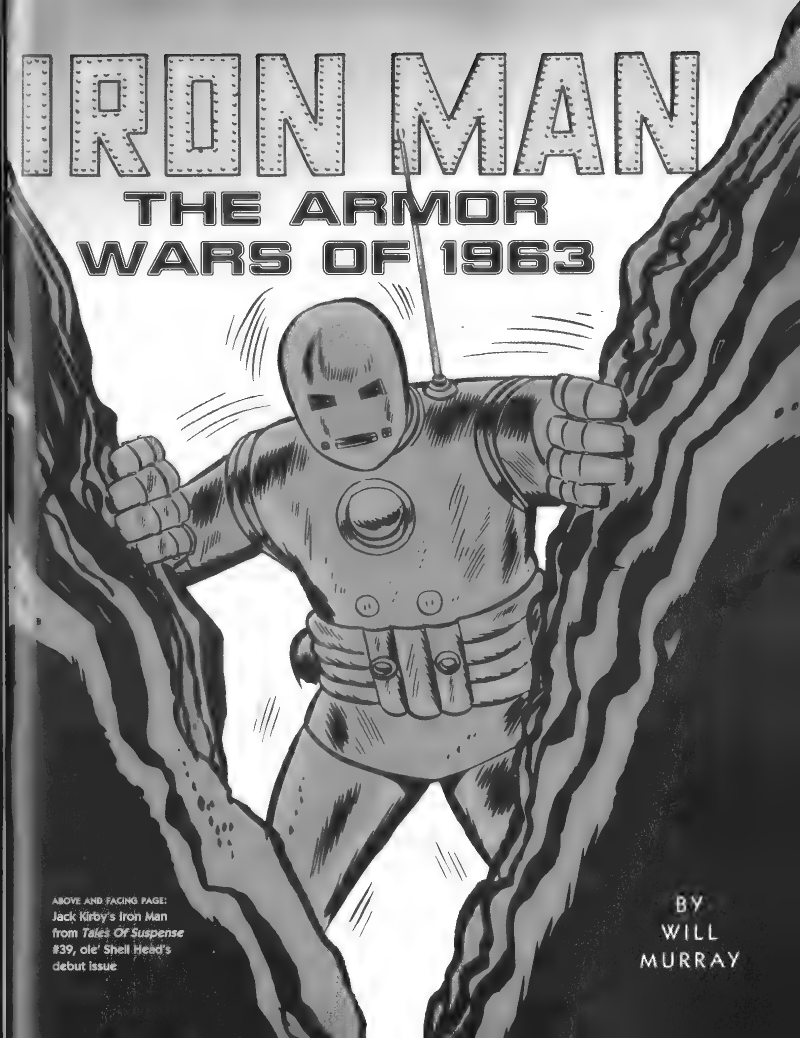
"I would be thinking along the lines of some character I liked," he said, "and I would be the same kind of character Al Hirschfeld or Basil Wolverton. The features I'm thinking of have a handsome, well-looking guy who was rich."

It's obvious that Don Heck had tremendous input onto the creation of the strip. But how deep did that go?

When we open *Tales of Suspense* #40, we find the character designed essentially follows Kirby's cover to *TOS* #39. Kirby has streamlined the design slightly, removing the rivets from head and body, and replacing the helmet with a skirt. But that couldn't simply indicate that upon his return from Vietnam—where he built the original armor from scrap iron—Stark fashioned a more elaborate version out of superior U.S. materials. On page 5, showing this armor to be collapsible seems to prove this beyond a reasonable doubt. This is also the issue where Stark spray paints Iron Man's duds to a new gleaming gold, but that's a cosmetic change to the existing armor, not a remade; they say, because back then it was very difficult to get a consistent paint in the printing stage.)

IRON MAN

THE ARMOR WARS OF 1963



ABOVE AND FACING PAGE:
Jack Kirby's Iron Man from *Tales Of Suspense* #39, ole' Shell Head's debut issue

BY
WILL
MURRAY

THE SECRET ORIGIN OF IRON MAN

by Will Murray

Contrary to accepted Marvel history, Iron Man may not have been the last superhero created for Stan Lee's classic transitional fantasy titles, but one of the first!

While Stan Lee had consistently held that he originated the core concept that became Iron Man, according to long-time Kirby friend and comics professional Mark Evanier, Kirby claimed that he brought the character concept later to grace the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #39 to Stan sometime in 1962. But it was not Kirby's hope to place his new brainchild in the last superhero-free fantasy book left at Marvel. No, Kirby had his sights set on bigger things for the future Armored Avenger. He wanted to see Iron Man launched in his own magazine a la *The Incredible Hulk*. But that would have meant cancelling a viable title, like *Modeling with Millie* or one of Marvel's popular Westerns, which publisher Martin Goodman would have been reluctant to do.

"Jack's version of it was that they had talks about doing *Iron Man*, but the book did not go forward because Goodman wasn't ready for it," explains Evanier. "So they put it on the shelf for some indeterminate period. Then the decision was made to add the characters to the anthology titles. At some point, Jack came in and Stan said, 'We're doing Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* with Don Heck.'"

When Kirby started to protest, Lee told him Heck needed the work. Always sensitive to freelancer issues, Kirby obligingly if reluctantly deferred to Lee.

This suggests that Iron Man, the last superhero to be introduced into Marvel's fantasy titles, may well have been the first, or among the first to be created, predating Ant-Man, Thor and Spider-Man!

"My understanding is that Iron Man was conceived, and there was a sketch of Iron Man sitting on the shelf, before there was any thought that the fantasy books would have heroes," says Evanier. "Jack's recollection was that it was going to be a stand-alone book."

Evanier notes that Kirby was forever generating character sketches that might be used in any number of ways. During this shelved phase, Iron Man might have gone the same route as the Sub-Mariner. "If Stan had said, 'Let's stick this guy in *Fantastic Four* this month as a villain, that's where the character would have been,'" Evanier speculates.

In fact, a very similar Kirby concept, "The Thing Called Metallo," had appeared in *Tales of Suspense* #16 as a cobalt-colored villain back in 1961. (One wonders why Iron Man was never depicted in that more realistic blue hue.)

It should be noted that Stan Lee has always claimed that the character originated in the Marvel offices with him. Evanier remembers Don Heck telling him that Iron Man started with a phone conversation between he and Lee, who gave him the origin plot verbally, with the cover sketch coming later in the mail, along with other sketches. The Larry Lieber script soon followed. Evanier also recalls Heck telling him he wasn't wild about the original armor design.

Continued on page 27

IRON MAN ARMOR WARS

But with *TOS* #41, Iron Man is very different. He's the neckless jawless "Shell-Head" Iron Man that Stan Lee often joked about in cover blurbs. Yet in subsequent issues, drawn and inked by Heck, the original oval headgear design reasserts itself.

Variations in the helmet continued both in *Tales of Suspense* and the early *Avengers* until the first major armor revamping in *TOS* #48 late in the year. There is no apparent consistency.

But there is a pattern.

Even in the Kirby-drawn issues, Iron Man is not the same. In some issues, he isn't the same from panel to panel. In *TOS* #40, for example, his helmet is distinctly Kirbyesque —neckless but with a modified chin.

It was then that I realized why whenever Kirby drew him, the armor varied. It depended upon whether or not Don Heck was inking him.

What if, I began to wonder, the design variations were not Kirby quirks, but deliberately imposed by Heck in the inking stage? What if the prototype Iron Man armor of *Tales of Suspense* #39 was not the pure Kirby design, but a Don Heck variant Kirby was either oblivious to or chose to ignore?

With that theory in mind, I systematically went back over the seminal Iron Man tales in *Tales of Suspense* #39-47. And here is what I found:

Iron Man is fairly consistent in #39. There are a couple of oddities. For one thing, on the splash page, he seems to be wearing a skirt, not trunks. On pages 7 and 8, the helmet flips back and forth between the bullet look and the jut-jawed look. When Iron Man is first activated, he's clearly wearing trunks. But on page 8, panel 3, his pelvis is skirted. For the remainder of the tale, it varies. His car-aerial-style shoulder antenna comes and goes, as do the body rivets, but this may be artistic oversight.

Much the same variations exist in #40, Iron Man Versus Gargantus. Although skirted on the splash page, Iron Man is in trunks for his first story appearance on page 2. For the remainder of the adventure, he wears the metal kilt. The shoulder antenna is completely absent. Most importantly, the Golden Gladiator's helmet is neckless, but boasts a rudimentary chin. This can be explained as Heck modifying Kirby's pencils in the ink stage. You can see him struggle with trying to carve a jaw where there was none, often compromising, sometimes allowing the pencils to stand unaltered. Even when Heck succeeds, the result looks nothing like the drop-forged jawline of the previous issue.

In #41, it's the Kirby version all the way. The helmet is dome-like, Stark's mouth is visible through its slit and Iron Man's eyeholes are big open apertures. The skirt hangs longer, too. No sign of trunks. Coaxial coil-like fingers mark the gloves, a design element unseen in Heck. And at Iron Man's the back is a third belt pod also not seen before. Dick Ayers inked this story, which pitted Iron Man against the villainous Dr. Strange.

Heck is back in full control as penciler and inker in the Red Barbarian story in #42. Finger are minimally jointed. The

shoulder aerial disappears again. The rear belt pod goes back to being the square design element of the prototypal Iron Man. However, the Kirby skirt is here without variation, indicating a concession on Heck's part. Iron Man's face reverts to the more sinister forged-skull look of yore. It's a look that will resurface with a vengeance after Heck reclaims the strip in the wake of Ditko's major overhaul. Here it's more subtle, but unmistakably present.

The cast-iron skull look of Iron Man was calculated on Heck's part, he told me. "I always tried to put a face, almost like a skull, on Iron Man. I was thinking of a skull look, especially when he got the new costume."

For the remainder of the golden Iron Man's existence, whenever Kirby drew him, whether in *Tales of Suspense* or the Ayers-inked *Avengers*, he resembled a bulky bullet-headed robot. Whenever Heck was the artist, or inked Kirby pencils, the helmet suggested a threatening drop-forged death's head.

By the time of Iron Man last pre-transformation battle against the Melter in *TOS* #47, the soon-to-be-obsolete design was a compromise. Ditko penciled the issue, with Heck inking. The skull helmet is in evidence with its vented mouth. But in the next issue, which was Ditko inked by Dick Ayers, the mouth again is an open slit. Ditko consistently drew Iron Man with a chin. (It's interesting that while Ditko stayed with the Kirby mouth-slit when he drew the golden armor, for the red-and-gold streamlined version, he vented the mouth aperture a la Heck!)

Heck reclaimed the strip after Ditko's brief run, at first following the revamped designed. But five issues later, Heck again tinkered with Iron Man's headgear, this time reverting it back to the solid-state skull-faced look that he had originally imposed on the Kirby prototype! Rivets were added to the face. When I asked him about it, Heck wasn't clear on whether the rivets were his contribution, or dictated by Lee.

"Suddenly rivets were put into it," he recalled. "That was stuff that I got in: 'We're changing this.' I guess it wasn't selling that well. I was always thinking of a skull-type look. Maybe I did it and Stan said, 'No, that's not what we want.'"

All throughout Iron Man's early career, his character design was consistently inconsistent. The rivetless skirted-suit takes hold permanently in #40. The helmet morphs back and forth, depending on the artist. It isn't until the Golden Gladiator battled the Mad Pharaoh in *TOS* #44 that Heck finally accepted Kirby's shoulder aerie land rear belt-pod for good. But he clung to his version of the helmet to the bitter end.

One could blame these inconsistencies on differing artistic interpretations, but the key to this mystery lies in two similar panels four issues apart. In *TOS* #40 page 7, panel 5 and again in #43, page 9, panel 4, Stark is shown with his headgear hanging behind him. In both Kirby-drawn scenes, the bulletlike dome version is clearly depicted. In fact, when Stark dons in it #43, Heck followed the pencils, depicting it as a collapsible chinless shell. For the rest of the story, however, the jaw is always there except for page 13, panel 1, where the Iron Man figure was too small to easily fix. Clearly, Kirby preferred his original helmet design, just as Heck stubbornly stuck to his.

But the final word on the issue comes, as it should, from Jack Kirby himself. In Ray Wyman's *The Art of Jack Kirby*, the King is quoted thusly:

"Iron Man was a concept of survival. This guy could not survive without a specially designed suit—so with this suit he made himself more powerful than he could ever imagine himself to be. He was almost like a god, but he was also a prisoner of his own invention. Don [Heck] did an excellent job of interpreting Iron Man. He redesigned the costume and strengthened the character. I think what he did was very professional. A character like this should evolve and I couldn't have done the job any better."

The covers of *Tales of Suspense* #43 (Kirby) and #45 (Heck) tell the tale. The Kirby Iron Man sports a helmet shaped like a bullet set in its shell, with wide eyeholes and an open slit of a mouth. Heck's version is drawn with eyes that are deepset (like the eye-sockets in a skull) with a grilled mouth-slit and headgear with a jutting jaw. Heck's armor is also studded with innumerable seam rivets.

Reading that, a fan might be forgiven for thinking Kirby slipped, referring to Don Heck instead of Steve Ditko. But I believe that Kirby did mean Heck, and was giving the man credit for the earliest incarnation of the invincible Iron Man.

Conclusion: Don Heck unquestionably modified the original Kirby armor. It makes sense that he was the one to do so. After all, Heck inked the cover to *TOS* #39. No one else would have been in a position to alter the cover concept drawing.

That means if we could see the original Kirby cover pencils to *TOS* #39, they would surely depict a skirted Shell-Head. Alas, no one photocopied Kirby pencils for posterity in those days.

One question remains: When did Heck offer the radical redesign of said armor? Before drawing *(Continued on page 27)*

Who Redesigned the Ant-Man?

by Will Murray

Next to Iron Man, Ant-Man is the Jack Kirby character who underwent the most frequent costume transformations over the course of his long career. From his humble beginnings in the pre-hero era as beleaguered biologist Henry Pym, through his first costumed incarnation as Ant-Man, on down to his retooling as Giant Man, Goliath, Yellow Jacket, and beyond, this star-crossed character has-seemed always in search of a permanent identity.

But even in his first adventure in *Tales to Astonish* #35, Ant-Man's costume seemed to change from page to page. The splash page of "Return of the Ant-Man" shows a character in a standard red superhero outfit with blue trunks, boots and gloves. A black graphic on his chest seems to suggest an abstract segmented ant body. One of the most inventive of Kirby's early Marvel concepts, Pym's ant-form cybernetic helmet serves the dual purpose of masking his face and communicating with his ant comrades. (And maybe enabling his ant-friends to better bond with him, too.)

However, the Ant-Man ensemble depicted on the splash page is not the same costume Pym wears in succeeding pages in his debut. For one thing, tubes connecting his metallic antennae to his stylized microphone mandibles are absent for the rest of the story. The blue trunks disappear too. For the rest of the story, Ant-Man seems to be wearing some kind of crimson coverall garment in which which the trunk lines come and go. But they're colored red throughout. This suggests the outfit of a worker rather than a superhero. For some reason, while blue and red are on the splash, the costume is actually red and light purple for the balance of the story.

This may be a colorist error. The boots are consistent throughout the origin, decorated with curious black mandible markings and thick soles seemingly designed for the rough magnified terrain Ant-Man will operate in. These are not the boots Pym will wear for the remainder of his career as Ant-Man. Beginning with the next story, he wears thin blue boots that match his gloves, down to the multi-pointed Harlequin-style cuff pattern.

One thing stands out on the splash page of Part 2, "An Army of Ants," and that is the helmet. Shown crouching in an ant colony, Ant-Man is holding his helmet in his hands at an angle which obscures most of his face. Yet his naked brow ridge is visible and colored in a flesh tone. It's clear from this depiction that the helmet does not have a mask and eyehole attachment. It is simply a helmet, open at the face. Throughout the story the helmet has the eye holes, but in some panels they appear out of balance, is if added after the fact by the inker, such as on the page showing the schematic diagram.

I'm not sure who inked this story. It has a slightly different feel from the typical Dick Ayers work of that era. It might some other artist, such as Frank Giacoia. Nowhere else in the story is the helmet open at the face, although many of the panels are too small for such detail to show through. On the first panel of page 8, we see the helmet from above, and there is the suggestion of an open face, but it's impossible to be certain. Finally, on the last panel, we see Henry Pym walking away while casting the symbolic superheroic shadow against the wall. A brow ridge suggesting the unmasked version is clearly visible.

If Ant-man was redesigned on the fly, it was almost certainly a Stan Lee call, with the inker executing the alterations during his phase of the production. But why would Kirby get it right on the splash and deviate so much in the story? Maybe because the splash was not originally the splash, but the first character sketch.

And there's another possibility here What if the Ant-Man uniform was in fact a salvage job? What if it was the costume of the original Jack Kirby version of Spider-Man?

This is not so far-fetched. Steve Ditko has commented in print he recalls the Kirby Spider-Man having a symbol reminiscent of Ant-Man's on his chest. If we follow this idea, there are elements which fit and elements that do not. Ditko did not recall a Spider-Man helmet, so we can safely dispense with that. But the thick Ant-Man boots might have enabled a Kirby-designed Spider-Man to climb walls by mechanical means. (Ditko also remembered a webgun, indicating a non-spider-powered hero) And could the black stylized ant symbol have been an abstract spider in the original?

It seems clear from the job numbers on the first Spider-Man story (X-189) and Ant-Man tale (X-198) that they were drawn only weeks apart, and published a month apart.

It must be noted that on the cover of *Tales To Astonish* #35, Pym's uniform is consistent with later issues, right down to the boots. Perhaps because the covers were usually done after the interior. But it shows how swiftly Kirby was retooling Ant-Man's look.

Given Kirby's constant interest in innovation, it's entirely possible that he conceived Ant-Man's cybernetic helmet as maskless This would make a certain amount of sense, because as a miniature hero, Ant-Man would not really need to mask his face. In action, his features would be too small to be recognizable. Of course, Kirby was always tinkering with his costume designs, if not absent-mindedly forgetting key details. He was notorious for this on Thor. In the controlled fury of Kirby's need to generate so many pages a day, the Thunder God's six chest disks often dropped down to four. Thor's monogram belt buckle disappears after the first issue, also.

I've always considered the Ant-Man costume design one of Kirby's best. But I have to admit I like it better in its original form, sans trunks, as a coverall worker's uniform. After all, Ant Man tended to hang around with worker ants much of the time. Why shouldn't he dress accordingly?

And I'm mighty thankful to this day that Jack Kirby was taken off Spider-Man. For all we know, the Kirby Spidey might have shrunk down to spider-size and taken up with assorted tarantulas and black widow spiders—and where would he be today?

the origin, during, or after? I went back to Mark Ellis for clarification. After I told him of my findings, he remembered that Heck offered the overhaul design after drawing Iron Man's origin. If implemented, it would have debuted in *TOS* #40 rather than the golden armor. Mark's memory also gave up the specific recollection that Heck expressed unhappiness with the Kirby mouth slit and the iron skirt.

As far as the prototype armor is concerned, I think the variations came about this way: Heck penciled the origin story from the uninked cover and found the armor too inflexible for action storytelling, especially the helmet, which was capable only of swiveling from side to side. For example, on page 8 where Iron Man falls, his fixed helmet would have had him falling literally on his cast-iron face. Heck suggested to Lee that the armor be made more flexible. At this point, Heck was given permission to improve the Kirby design and does so during the ink stage of the story, at the same time altering the design on the cover. The specific situations where Heck can't easily fix his own pencils are consistent with later examples in Kirby-drawn tales, like *Tales of Suspense* #40

I can't help but wonder how a Heck-designed Iron Man would have looked back in 1963. Perhaps a hint might be found in the many pre-hero robot stories Heck drew for Stan Lee. Or maybe that rejected armor was recycled for the Crimson Dynamo or Titanium Man, to name two early Heck-designed armored Iron Man foes. Come to think of it, Titanium Man's headgear does have a death's-head look to it. We'll never know.

One final thought on the matter of Iron Man: Jack Kirby tended toward rough-hewn all-American heroic types like Ben Grimm or Nick Fury. Sophisticated pretty-boys like Tony Stark were not really his masculine ideal. If fate had decreed that Jack Kirby had been more involved with the origin of Iron Man than he was, I wonder—who would the King have placed inside that hulking gray armor?

IRON MAN ORIGIN *Cont. from page 24*

Reportedly, Martin Goodman was not satisfied with the first Iron Man story and wanted to know why Kirby hadn't done it. Heck quoted Lee as telling him at the time, "You did a great job, Don. Kirby's doing the book from now on."

Ironically, Goodman's dissatisfaction with Iron Man's origin may have spilled over to scripter Larry Lieber.

"The first story was not well liked in the office," asserts Evanier

Coincidence or not, Iron Man's origin became the last Larry Lieber superhero script for quite a while. Robert Bernstein replaced him on Iron Man and Thor, and others on the Human Torch and Ant-Man. Lee soon replaced them too, and took over all superhero writing himself until the advent of Roy Thomas Lieber was reassigned to Westerns and back-of-the-book fantasy features, where he thrived

All these machinations may help explain why it took so long for *Tales of Suspense* to finally acquire a lead superhero feature. The last-minute design changes probably added to the late appearance of the first Iron Man story, whose job number (X-51) suggests it was originally scheduled for the February, 1963 *TOS* #38

The speed at which Iron Man's armor is revamped is striking. It parallels Marvel's problem with the Hulk a year before. Introduced as gray, he was quickly recolored green in the second issue because in those days it was very difficult to get a consistent gray tone from the four-color comic book presses. It's possible that the story in *TOS* #40 was done after #41 and moved up to modify the character as soon as possible. In *The Hulk*, which was a bi-monthly, and therefore with a longer lead time, they simply colored him green in #2 without explanation or fanfare. *TOS* #40 smacks on a continuity insert.

The problem is this can't be definitively proven. "Iron Man Versus Gargantus" was published in *TOS* #40 April, 1963, job number X-131. X-128-130 constitute the entire contents of *Gunsmoke Western* #75, cover-dated March, 1963—a full month before *TOS* #40. But *Gunsmoke* was a bi-monthly, and on an offset schedule compared to the monthlies, so it proves little. X-121 designates *Sgt. Fury* #1, May, 1963. X-125 belongs to the lead Ant-Man tale in *Tales to Astonish* #43, May, 1963. *Fantastic Four* #13, April, 1963 is job-numbered X-138. Ultimately, all available evidence seems to place the Gargantus story in the May cover-date sequence.

If this theory is correct, then the job number for "The Stronghold of Dr. Strange" should fall comfortably within the numerical series for Marvel comics cover-dated April, 1963, and pre-date X-131. Unfortunately, this Iron Man story does not sport a job number. Nor do the backup stories in that issue. And X-132 was assigned to the second story in *TOS* #40. But this might be explained by Lee shelving the entire original contents of *TOS* #40 as a block as the most expedient way to avoid any potential plot conflicts between the lead Iron Man tale and the backup stories.

Ultimately, the theory of the swapped stories must remain in realm of pure supposition. But there is no hard evidence to contradict it.

A final thought on Kirby's contribution to Iron Man. Evanier recalls that Kirby referred to Tony Stark as "the handsomest man in comics." While we'll never know if the additional sketches Heck said came with the prototype armor design included any references to Kirby's idea for the man inside the cast-iron exoskeleton, Evanier notes this: "Jack was at that point very interested in Howard Hughes. Hughes was one of the celebrities that Jack was always fascinated with. He used to talk about Howard Hughes a lot. I think that Jack at some point saw Iron Man as Howard Hughes, and that was probably what prompted Heck to draw Errol Flynn."

Evanier also recalled that Heck was under the mistaken impression that Jack Kirby was operating in some kind of paid capacity to create characters for Marvel, which is why Heck didn't think it strange that he was given a Kirby character to flesh out.

The Four Fantastic Phases of Silver Age Marvel!

BY PIERRE COMTOIS

Measured against its impact over the past thirty years, Silver Age Marvel remains the single most important group of comics published during that period. Although DC revived the market for superheroes in the mid and late 1950s and led the way in certain innovations; it wasn't until Marvel recreated the image of the superhero in a new mold that costumed adventurers became the predominant element in modern comics. In looking more closely at the development of Silver Age Marvel, one sees a progression of storytelling complexity as editor and writer Stan Lee moved from an early determination to try something new, to a growing consciousness that they'd stumbled onto something special. Silver Age Marvel breaks down into four phases, the formative years, the years of consolidation, the later more pretentious years, and the twilight years.

PHASE ONE: The Formative Years

From a Marvel collector's point of view, *Fantastic Four* #1 (November 1961) is the book that neatly divides the history of comic books into two eras—everything that came before and everything that came after. This book redefined the parameters of comics, and in order to survive, all others would eventually have to follow its lead.[1]

Lee has always claimed that *FF* #1 was Marvel's attempt to cash in on the latest comic book fad (DC's *JLA*), and in the process to apply some ideas he had for a new approach to superheroes. Somehow fans recognized these ideas—through the conventional plot trappings—and gave Lee (and the inestimable contributions of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and others) enough support to continue. Enough support grew into active demand, and Marvel, at first unsurely except for the idea of unconventionality, soon saw the larger potential of the new direction, and *Fantastic Four* became the main vehicle for some inspired storytelling.

Expanding the arena for his new ideas (but at the same time staying within the genre of the monster yarn) Lee and Kirby came out with a new title six months after the debut of the FF. Marvel had forged ahead—with some compromises—in their depiction of the FF as more realistic heroes. They donned functional jump-suits as costumes (blazoned with a "4"), acquired a skyscraper-top headquarters, and a fancy flying car. Despite some of the superhero conventions, Lee managed to write the characters into the real world. And the real world loomed very large for their new character, Dr. Bruce Banner, one of comics greatest… and most compelling… tragic characters.

With the creation of the Incredible Hulk, Lee and Kirby found the perfect symbol for the new vision of what it would be like to have super powers. The Hulk inhabited a shadowland between monster and hero, and, perhaps, pushed past reader

identification—despite Kirby's vigorous rendering—for the title was cancelled after six issues.

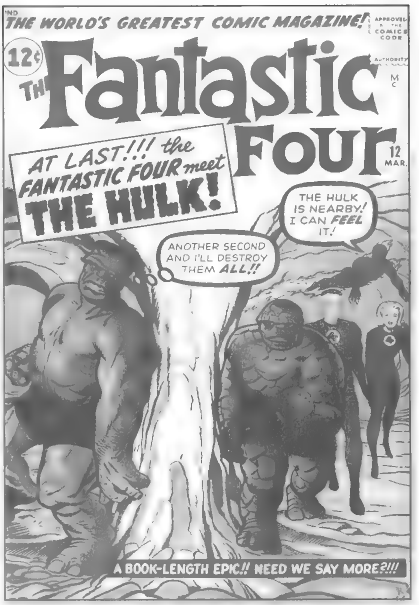
This blur between hero and villain was becoming a central point of the expanding Marvel group of characters. No better example of this can be found than the revival of Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, in *Fantastic Four* #4; although a strong case can also be made for the recurring nemesis that first appeared in *FF* #5, Dr. Doom. With genius to rival Mr. Fantastic's, and without the moral scruples to temper it, Doom becomes the most dangerous man in the Marvel universe. Dr. Doom was ruthlessness personified—a glimpse of what might have motivated real-life villains like Hitler and Stalin. Lee played Doom like a harp, showing moments of exquisite sensibility giving way to brutal villainy—and making a very complicated character.

Fantastic Four #12 premiered what would become another fixture of the Marvel age—the crossover. Towards the end of a 23-page story the FF and the Hulk meet, and unlike the noble camaraderie of DC characters meeting, the Marvel style was to start with a brawl. The Thing and the Hulk share some of the same frustrations—as they both pay for their strength by having to exist in a monstrous form. By this time Kirby was carrying the art to greater lengths, as befit the strip's star status. And Dick Ayers was inking—having worked with Jack all through the pre-hero monsters, he took Kirby's pencils to a sure and solid finished product. And Stan's scripting showed that he was mastering the dynamics of the team's characters.

At this same time, in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (August 1962) Marvel introduced a new character that would go on to eclipse even the FF in importance. Spider-Man was the culmination of the "anti-hero" formula they'd first explored in the FF. Taking an egghead teenager and throwing in girl problems, money problems, and a radioactive spider—resulted in the era's most popular hero. Spider-Man had to wash and sew his own costume, pay for his transportation to crime scenes, endure attacks by the media, and become the object of fear and distrust by the general public… and even his fellow superheroes!

Steve Ditko drew the strip, and his talent for capturing the look of ordinary people was crucial to the success of this "everyman" saga. Lee's sure hand with dialogue combined with Ditko's ability to express emotion—and the origin twist where the crook that Spidey allows to elude his security guard pursuers goes on to murder Peter Parker's father-figure, Uncle Ben, really sets the tone for a character-driven series. So Spidey starts off with a huge guilt trip, illustrating the origin's tag line, "With great power there must also come… great responsibility."

Tales of Suspense #39 (March 1963) exhibits a further refinement of the realistic hero idea—the flawed hero. These ironic heroes, who, despite public acclaim, find personal satisfaction elusive. Tony Stark's flaw is physical, a piece of shrapnel lodged in deadly proximity to his heart. The apparatus that makes him Iron Man, gives him life itself—keeping the shrapnel from making its fatal move. This "Sword of Damocles" gave Lee his best opportunity to explore the tragic side of superheroes. And Don Heck was the perfect artist for the strip—that focused on human interaction rather than the simpler action of good guy versus bad guy.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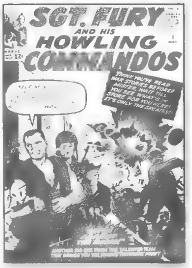
AT LAST!!! the FANTASTIC FOUR meet THE HULK!
THE HULK IS NEARBY! I CAN FEEL IT!
ANOTHER SECOND AND I'LL DESTROY THEM ALL!!
A BOOK-LENGTH EPIC!! NEED WE SAY MORE?!!!

The FF vs. the Hulk in issue #12 (Mar 1963). Stan Lee returns to the war genre with *Sgt. Fury* #1 (May 1963)



Lee once said that he created Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos on a bet to show that he could put his new spin on any genre, even war comics. Thus *Sgt. Fury* #1 (May 1963) billed itself as "the war comic for people who hate war comics." This often uncelebrated Marvel Silver series deserves better—for it's over-the-top Lee/Kirby in a big way. As far removed from the competition's war books as it could possibly be, *Sgt. Fury* was less of a gritty war title and more of an outrageous exaggeration of Army life. Not only did Sgt. Fury offer rip-

Even with the consistent increase in demand during the last 3 1/2 decades, *Strange Tales* #115 (Dec 1963, featuring the origin of Dr. Strange) still Guides for an affordable $38 in GD and $114 in FN

snortin' Kirby action art, it also featured some of the funniest scenes of the Silver Age… in a genre whose main concern was combat of all kinds. Unfortunately, when Lee and Kirby left the strip, the book lost its unique qualities.

Another fruitful and continuing formula for success was patterned with the X-Men. As was first hinted at in *X-Men* #1 (September 1963) the team of teenage outcasts was only the tip of an iceberg—a whole sub-culture of mutants alienated from normal society. The mysterious Professor X presided over the original group—Cyclops, Beast, Marvel Girl, Iceman, and the Angel. As the series progressed the fear with which Homo sapiens regarded the mutants increased. This Lee/Kirby creation stands unique in that the group dynamics of the X-Men are not just banding together to fight evil, but as a survival tool, united by their genetic conflicts with society.

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ONLY MIGHTY MARVEL WOULD DARE TO STRIKE BACK IN A TALE
THE RETURN OF SANDMAN!
THE STORY YOU'VE NEVER EXPECTED TO READ!
WHY DOES APRIL O'NEIL IN HELPLESS FEAR FOR THE SANDMAN
STALKS THE CITY'S STREETS?
PREPARES FOR CONFLICT WITH A FOE WHO'S LIKE A DREAM COME TRUE—BUT NIGHTMARE!

Amazing Spider-Man #18 (Nov 1964) features appearances by the villainous Sandman, The Avengers, Daredevil, Green Goblin, and the Fantastic Four!

Another two-part story records a key chapter in Spider-Man's career. With "The Return of the Green Goblin" in *Amazing Spider-Man* #17 Lee and Ditko manage to gather together all the little idiosyncrasies of Spidey/Peter Parker and meld them into archetypal form. Peter's nemesis at school, Flash Thompson, decides to start a Spider-Man fan club, and the Green Goblin sees the club's first meeting as the perfect place to defeat and humiliate his enemy. But Peter receives a phone call—Aunt May is seriously ill. So Spidey runs away from his fight with the Goblin, and the press labels him a coward. Ditko's quirky unassuming style is just right for all this—the gang at school, Aunt May and her attempts to get Peter together with his cousin Mary Jane, and Spidey's misfortunes that arise from his double life.

The lead antagonist, Magneto, was more than just a villain. As the leader of the mutant faction that thought it best to engage the humans in open war—the more the mutants suffered the more the tragic aspects of Magneto's character were revealed. The setup of the series became a fascinating duel between Prof. X and Magneto to define the role of the mutants.

The Human Torch solo strip, in *Strange Tales* starting with #101, soon became secondary to the Lee/Ditko creation of Dr. Strange, Master of the Mystic Arts, which began in issue #110. In #115 (December 1963) Dr. Strange's origin is told. He was a surgeon who, after an auto accident, could no longer perform delicate operations. He becomes an alcoholic drifter. Finally he goes to a man of magic, the Ancient One, who he hopes will restore the use of his hands. Instead he becomes the master's pupil in the mystic arts. Steve Ditko's awesome imagination flourished in these fantasy tales. Although he was a more straightforward character, Dr. Strange was a definite asset to the Marvel canon.

PHASE TWO:
The Years of Consolidation

After the formative phase came a two-year period, before the stories evolved along the more serious and dramatic vein of the later years, that was marked by the consolidation of the Marvel universe. With the Marvel style fully formed, a network of crossovers and contrasts was begun—an attempt to weave the Marvel mythos into a coherent whole. The innovative storytelling combined just the right amount of melodrama with broad hints that nothing was to be taken too seriously. In short—it was a kind of realism, but a realism guided by creators clearly having fun with the mixing and matching of characters. And the readers were enthralled

Fantastic Four #25 was billed as the "battle of the century." It's one of the earliest continued stories, breaking neatly in half to conclude in #26. Issue #25 is mostly devoted to a knock-down drag-out fight between the Thing and the Hulk. The issue ends with a lull in the fighting, and in #26 Marvel staged a crossover with their other hero squad, the Avengers. Despite the abundance of characters in the 22-page second-half of the story, each one gets a turn in the spotlight. This was a major move in bringing the various Marvel continuities into a consistent pattern.

Spidey admits defeat to himself, blaming his alter-ego and vowing to quit it, until he gets a lecture from Aunt May, who—feeling better—discourses on strength of character and overcoming personal misfortune. Inspired by his aunt, Peter dons

his costume again with renewed optimism. Stan and Steve took the superhero as low as he could go—and brought him back up again, in a benchmark story that contributed many elements that would recur in later Marvel history.

When Chic Stone became Kirby's regular inker, this was another unifying factor—since Kirby drew most of the covers and four of the series. This worked together with the crossovers and cross references in the consolidation of the Marvel universe. A great example of the Kirby/Stone work is the Thor story in *Journey Into Mystery* #109—a classic issue featuring a crossover from the X-Men, Magneto. Stone's inks are heavy and bold, and strengthen Kirby's pencils.

Is it coincidence that after Stone left Marvel the second phase ended and the next more "serious" one began? For the short time he was aboard, Chic Stone's more playful style perfectly matched the material. "Enter the Avengers" in *X-Men* #9 shows the Lee/Kirby/Stone team handling a huge cast of characters—what in later years would be a 12-issue mini-series they wrapped up in 20-pages. This story starts in the middle of the action—Prof. X is already in Lucifer's (an alien from another dimension) lair—when the X-Men and the Avengers show up—and the characters are all drawn in cleanly as the confrontation approaches…

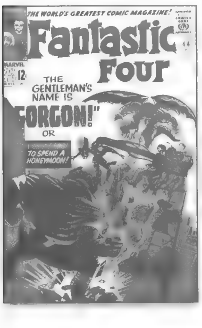
Sometimes one of the two-stories per ish titles would pack so much action into each tale that they both seemed feature-length yarns *Tales Of Suspense* #63 is like that—with Iron Man tracking down a mysterious saboteur within the sprawling Stark factory complex. Don Heck illustrated in an Alex Raymond style honed by years of horror and war comics art. He was the definitive Iron Man artist and always made us care about the character. The second half of the book chronicles the first Silver Age origin of Captain America. It's all there—the Nazi double-agent, the scrawny Steve Rogers, the transformation from weakling to warrior, and teaming up with Bucky Barnes. Kirby packs the ten pages full of action, while Lee demonstrates his ability to add new meaning to the familiar scenes

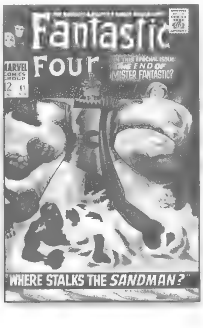
Avengers #3 boasts another big crossover "The Avengers Meet Sub-Mariner. In this one Subby joins forces with the Hulk, and they must combat Thor, Iron Man, and Giant-Man and the Wasp. The battle ends in a stalemate, but, again manages to establish the simultaneous co existence of many Marvel characters.

The issue where Ant-Man adds two letters to his name and becomes Giant-Man is noteworthy too. It was *Tales To Astonish* #49, and the new identity is adopted so that Hank Pym can better battle alien invaders. The art here is particularly good with Heck adding a delicate veneer to Kirby's pencils.

As a last entry from phase two, another Kirby/Stone collaboration seems appropriate—the "Epic Battle" of *Journey Into Mystery* #112. Thor fights without his enchanted powers, using only his own strength, against an enraged Hulk It's full of action in the Marvel manner—with another crossover to help create the sense of a realistic close-knit world where all the various series took place together

The highly collectible *Tales of Suspense* #63 (Mar 1965) contains the first Silver Age origin of Captain America, and Guides for an amazingly low $20 in GD and $60 in FN





PHASE THREE:

The Pretentious Years

Silver Age Marvel stretched across at least a decade, and in that time the storytelling became more mature, with more complex themes and presentations. In the third phase Marvel went from the consolidation of their universe to a more sophisticated and serious use of its inhabitants.

Fantastic Four #44 hails from 1965 and makes a good beginning for phase three. The four previous *FF* issues had shown some of the multi issue epic approach that during this period would become the main vehicle for the new style. *FF* #44 is the first of these mega-yarns

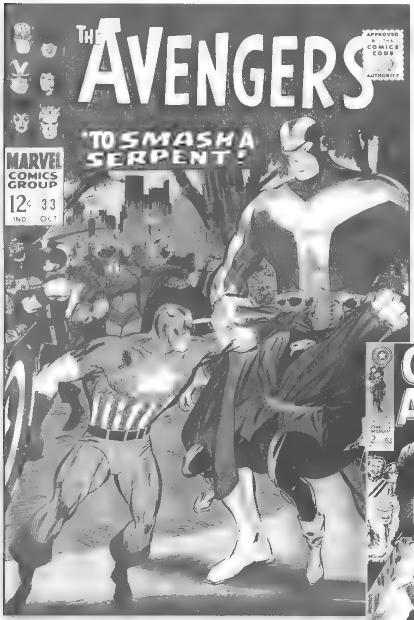
Fantastic Four #44 (Nov 1965) introduces the Gorgon and *FF* #61 (Apr 1967) features a Silver Surfer cameo

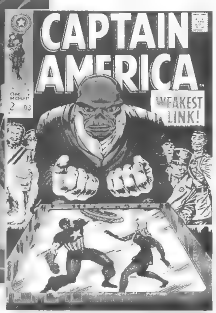
to drop hints about the Inhumans, a super-race that would play a large role in the coming years. It shows the new style, the "grand style," being used consciously and fully—a perfect example being the elevation of Medusa, a former FF villainess of minor import, into a character who's part of some cosmic game plan… And Kirby's pencils were inked by Joe Sinnott, who brought a new power and grandeur to the overall art. Stan Lee also wrote this era with a wickedly inflated prose that almost seemed to take itself seriously. And the Inhumans saga would prove to be only a warm-up for the next multi-part opus, where Galactus and the Silver Surfer took the stage.

By *Fantastic Four* #61 the Kirby/Sinnott art had settled into its larger-than-life look, and Lee's prose was effortlessly imposing. This multi-parter again features a once inconsequential villain revamped into a towering menace. Whereas in the past the Sandman and his team, the Frightful Four, couldn't together best the FF, the new Sandman can almost destroy them singlehandedly. This is a good example of phase three in that it takes what in the past would have been simply a hero/villain donnybrook and transforms it into something more expansive.

When *Avengers* #32 and 33 appeared only Fantastic Four and Thor stressed the new style, and the Avengers title never became a great vehicle for it—except for the "Sons of the Serpent" story-line in these two issues. Written by Lee and penciled and inked by the underrated Don Heck, the story is one of Marvel's first attempts to tackle social issues like racism. The Avengers fall into combat against a KKK-like organization called the Sons of the Serpent. The end of this tale really captures the high moral tone that was a hallmark of this era: "Beware of the man who sets you against your neighbor."

Cap's oldest foe, The Red Skull, dominates *CA* #103 (Jul 1968). *Avengers* #32 (Sep 1966) & *Avengers* #33 (Oct 1966) featured the "Sons of the Serpent" storyline in which the Avengers fight racism and a KKK-like organization





The new style affected Spider-Man somewhat less than other titles—for in this series the human element, provided by the main characters and the supporting cast, took precedence over any larger-than-life concerns. Nevertheless a new maturity infected this title as well. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #52 Spidey and his newspaper nemesis, J. Jonah Jameson, have escaped from the Kingpin in the final chapter of a multi-part story. Jameson goes his own way and meets up with an ex-con who was there dealing with the Kingpin, but, since Jameson had supported him upon his release from prison, when things heat up the man sacrifices himself to save Jameson. It was a poignant death scene—the grand style in a different guise. And John Romita's understated realistic art was perfect for this kind of subject.

Thor #140 shows how the combination of Kirby's pencils and Vince Colletta's inks produced a different style than the one used on the FF. The result was every bit the match for Stan Lee's most overblown kind of purple prose. The world of the gods rang with pseudo-Elizabethan oration in the Marvel portrayal of the mythological pantheon. This issue features another of the "petty villain from the past returns many times more powerful" plots, as Thor goes to Earth to battle the Growing Man.

The new style struck again in *Captain America* #103, the first chapter of a multi-parter with the Red Skull. The Red Skull, already a master menace, assumes gigantic proportions in the quality of his evil. Here, Kirby's pencils were inked by Sid Shores, who gave the art a Golden Age feel. This issue's face-off between hero and vil-

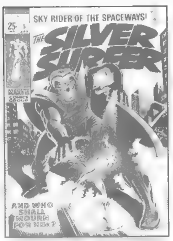
lain comes off like a larger than-life philosophical debate, charged with the high drama of Lee's writing in this period.

Daredevil #47 deals with the subject of the handicapped, and what better series to do this in than one where the hero is blind? Here Matt Murdock helps out a Vietnam vet who comes home from the war blind and heavy-hearted with self-pity. Matt Murdock guides the man past his feelings of uselessness and gives him back his fighting spirit. Throughout this sensitive and touching story no mention is made of the fact that Willie Lincoln is black. Lee, aided by the smooth penciling of Gene Colan, produced one of the most human stories in comics—showing that phase three storytelling wasn't all high-flown language and power-packed art.

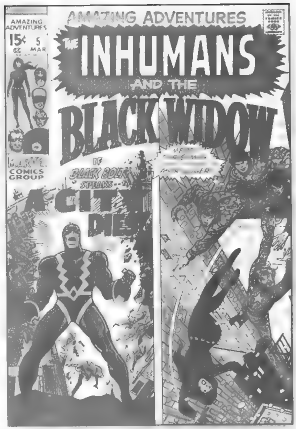
The issue of bigotry and intolerance was the theme for *Silver Surfer* #5, where the Surfer and Al Harper, a black physicist, team up against the Stranger. The whole Surfer series was a testament to the new style: double-length stories, a tortured lead character, and a combination of social commentary and cosmic sweep. Lee's recurring message of the potential for human greatness comes through as Harper gives his life to save a world that has shown him only hate and distrust. And John Buscema's subtle art captures Lee's tone nicely.

Dr. Strange was a natural for the larger-than-life approach, as he battled mystical menaces from elsewhere. Enthusiastically written by Roy Thomas, penciled by Gene Colan, and inked by Tom Sutton—the strip was a phantasmagoria of innovative layout. This reached a climax in *Dr. Strange* #181 when Dr. Strange enters the dream dimension to do battle with Nightmare. This was the grand style stretched to the limit—a psychedelic trip exaggerated until the world we know has completely disappeared.

Neal Adams, a late-comer to Marvel, teamed up with Roy Thomas on *X-Men* #63 as the teenaged mutants tangled with Magneto. Together with the jungle lord, Ka-Zar, they cross the Savage Land to confront their nemesis in his secret lair. The Thomas/Adams X-Men issues are memorable examples of phase three storytelling. Ka-Zar just can't understand the X-Men's discomfort with their powers, but we certainly can—as this issue brings their outcast status into sharp focus.



Silver Surfer #5 (Apr 1969) appeared in the squarebound 25¢ format and Guides at only $25 in FN



Amazing Adventures #5 (Mar 1971) features an Inhumans tale drawn by Neal Adams and written by Roy Thomas

PHASE FOUR: The Twilight Years

The first three phases of Silver Age Marvel divided rather neatly, but this fourth is more abstract. While Kirby's departure marks a likely point to end the Silver Age, even two years before he left the twilight era was beginning. This period is characterized by the growing lethargy of the established titles and the rise of imaginative new features produced by young creators making the transition from fans to pros. Sporadically these rising stars would imbue the old titles with some real vigor, but not on a sustained basis. So the twilight is lit by brief flashes, such as John Byrne's X-Men and FF, Frank Miller's Daredevil, and the Roger Stern and Buscema/ Palmer work on the Avengers.

It's easy enough to see in retrospect that the last 20 issues of *Fantastic Four* that Kirby drew lacked the verve of the first 80, perhaps due to his growing dissatisfaction with his position at Marvel. Lee gave Kirby almost complete control of plotting at this point, and many of the last 20 Kirby issues draw inspiration from popular TV shows and movies. *Fantastic Four* #84 is the first part of a four-part story, based on *The Prisoner* TV series, where Dr. Doom has the FF trapped in an Eastern European village. The characterization was slipping a bit, but the Kirby/Simnott art still packed a punch. However, around this time, Kirby started to repeat poses and layouts, a fault that helped drag the title down. Although Lee's scripting was as smooth as ever, this was the last really good yarn that the great team would turn out.

Marvel expanded into the horror genre (with help from a more lenient Comics Code Authority), and the books featured some memorable efforts. Most spectacular was Jim Steranko's story in *Tower Of Shadows* #1, in which the talented writer/artist took everything he'd learned in the past few years and applied it in one of the last jobs he would do for newsstand comics. These seven pages include every trick in the book, from collage to op-art effects, in a truly virtuoso performance.

Not that Marvel was ignoring superheroes, always their bread and butter. Harking back to the double-feature titles like *Tales Of Suspense*, they released two new books: *Astonishing Tales* and *Amazing Adventures* in this format. The latter title featured the Inhumans and the Black Widow. *Amazing Adventures* #5 was particularly memorable, with a Roy Thomas/Neal Adams Inhumans tale that shows why Adams

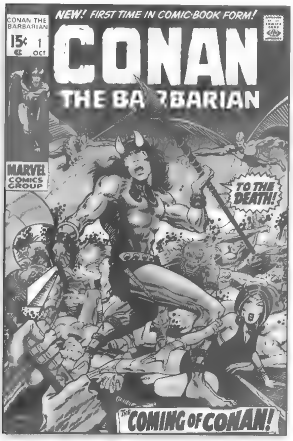
Several historians argue that *Conan* #1 (Oct 1970) qualifies as the starting point of the Bronze Age. The breakthrough title set a new benchmark for art and story. The title become the standard against which all other early 1970 comic books were measured. (See color section)

Written by Gerry Conway, *Daredevil* #86 (Apr 1972) brought a new tone of sophistication and mystery to the series

was such an influential artist. Thomas also wrote the Black Widow, and the art, with Colan's pencils inked by the awesome Bill Everett, was some of the moodiest of the period.

Barry Smith had worked for Marvel for a couple of years before he evolved his style. He started to find it in some horror tales, especially a tryout piece for a new Marvel property—Conan. This won him the job of artist on the Conan series. *Conan The Barbarian* #1 (October 1970) looks more like Smith's early Kirbyish work, but he very quickly forged his style in this sword and sorcery title. Soon the art became ornate and richly detailed, bringing the Hyborian age to vivid life. Within two years Smith would leave comics, like Steranko did. But the breakthrough art he produced for the Conan series makes *Conan* #1 comparable to *Fantastic Four* #1 in that it marks the clear beginning of a whole new era.

Gene Colan's style was perfectly suited to the horror genre, and he helped make *Tomb Of Dracula* an interesting title. He drew all 70 issues, creating a vampiric world of awful beauty. Early in the run Marv Wolfman took over as writer and proceeded to create a host of unforgettable characters. Dracula himself often became secondary to such as: Rachel Van Helsing—scarred for life by Dracula, Frank Drake—descendant of the fearsome Count, Taj—the giant mute whose family Dracula destroyed, Quincy Harker—crippled by Dracula and a life-long vampire hunter, Hannibal King—hard-boiled detective, Harold H. Harold—goofy would-be horror writer, and Dr. Sun—a disembodied brain seeking the secret of eternal life by dissecting Dracula.



Although Colan had been drawing *Daredevil* for years, the title succumbed to the same malaise that plagued the other main titles. But with *Daredevil* #86 it all turned around. Writer Gerry Conway came in with a series of stories that brought a new tone of sophistication and mystery to *Daredevil*. *DD* #91 is a good case in point. The Colan/Palmer art stands out as does Conway's deft handling of the romance between Daredevil and the Black Widow.

Frank Brunner was another of the new generation of artists who rapidly developed their own styles—and when he took over Dr. Strange he continued in the Colan vein, with the panel borders themselves giving way to otherworldly vistas. Writer Steve Englehart's plots almost always involved the life or death of entire universes—providing Brunner with some real imaginative opportunities

Spider-Man was having his ups and downs in the late Silver Age. Although both were fine artists neither John Buscema or Gil Kane were particularly suited to the down-to-earth Spidey style. But one of the definite ups was *Amazing Spider-Man* #121, where writer Gerry Conway teamed with Kane pencils and Romita inks to produce the death of Gwen Stacey at the hands of the Green Goblin From the classic cover to the unbelievable final panel the story carries the reader relentlessly on, through many of the large cast of supporting characters, and focusing on the slow nerve-wracking deterioration of Norman Osborne This great issue makes a fitting finale for a decade of pioneering tales of the web-slinger

Writer/artist Jim Starlin was another of the fast-blooming new breed at Marvel. He was given the Captain Marvel series, one that had never had much focus and went through many changes in a short time. Starlin took the floundering strip and transformed it into a cosmic epic. By *Captain Marvel* #29, he'd come into his own with both his art and a story-line that stretched to incredible length—taking Captain Marvel through various stages of self-awareness, pseudo-religious experience, and cosmic conflict. Starlin's larger-than-life was an intensely personal vision—one that readers would not soon forget.

The talented Rich Buckler was yet another of the up-and-coming crop of Marvel artists. Beginning in Kirby's shadow, he soon honed his action style, and, working with writer Doug Moench, created a different kind of character—one who foreshadowed the grim and violent sort that prowl today's comics. *Astonishing Tales* #25 (August 1974) featured the debut of Deathlok the Demolisher, a cyborg war machine of a devastated near future. Perhaps using the *Six Million Dollar Man* TV show as a takeoff point, Buckler's character, with the imaginative writing of Moench, became one of Marvel's great idea experiments. Moench wrote from three personas—straight narration, Deathlok's monologue, and the chatter of his internal computer, and would begin in the middle of violent action with Deathlok fighting hopelessly to regain his lost humanity. No strip better illustrates Marvel's

willingness to give creators the chance to develop offbeat ideas.

After winding up his Captain Marvel epic, Starlin left that title to work on a revival of a character that Roy Thomas had written in an earlier series as one clothed in a messianic mantle that would be perfect for Starlin's "religious" sensibilities. In *Strange Tales* #178 Warlock emerged full of quasi-science and psychological journeys that combined with crisp art into a super epic.

Starlin as artist teamed with writer Steve Englehart to give a new twist to the kung fu genre. Since Marvel had a license on Sax Rohmer's *Dr. Fu Manchu* characters, they decided to make Shang-Chi, the master of kung fu, into Fu Manchu's renegade son, thus giving the hero opportunities to use his martial arts skills on all sorts of monsters, ninjas, thugs, and assassins.

After Englehart and Starlin left the series, writer Doug Moench teamed up with another newcomer, Paul Gulacy, who—once again—soon developed his own vision. They took Shang-Chi on a series of James-Bondesque adventures, liberally laced with ironic commentary from the kung fu master. Like Steranko and Smith, Gulacy too, left comics soon after perfecting a bold new approach. But the rich Moench texts and the dazzling Gulacy visuals make their run on *Master of Kung Fu* a remarkable achievement.

A final demonstration of the vast variety in Marvel's twilight era is Killraven, Warrior of the Worlds. Roy Thomas created the series, which began as War of the Worlds, where the original H.G. Wells martians come back and conquer Earth. Humans are kept for food and sport, until one, trained as a gladiator, escapes and forms a rebel band. Don McGregor took over as writer and steered the strip through a succession of pencilers until Craig Russell came on to it. Russell, like others discussed here, started off crudely but soon became an excellent illustrator—giving McGregor's dense prose a perfect accompaniment. In *Amazing Adventures* #34 they weave a poignant tale that redefines Killraven and his band in terms of a family.

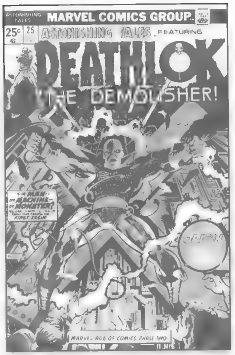
Like Conan and Deathlok and Master of Kung Fu, Killraven shows how fecund the twilight was. This period has too long been viewed solely as a time when Marvel's traditional and established titles were on the wane.

Marvel's Silver Age lasted only about ten years (with maybe another five or so counting the early Bronze Age) but its impact has been felt far longer. Characterization, humor, action, story development, a maturation of the art form itself and a genuine humanism were the more important elements bequeathed to an industry that had become increasingly moribund (simple costume changes made at other companies, no matter how dashing, would not have rescued the industry and caught the widespread attention of the world outside comics).

With its new approach to comics, Silver Age Marvel (with the personable Stan Lee out front) was able to impart new momentum to the industry that did not really begin to lose steam until the mid to late '80s. In the '90s, the industry was fractured, became cynical and (with the departure of the "old pros" over the years), lost its institutional memory and became mired in an ever-shrinking sea of confused storytelling and perversion.

Can the industry pull out of its tailspin? Try this on for size: can any of today's comics companies match the excited anticipation a fan in 1964 must have felt when setting eyes on the words "Two More Triumphs for Marvel!" and getting his first glimpses of such classics as *Spider-Man* #13 featuring the first appearance of Mysterio ("Who or what is he?"), *Avengers* #5 "The Invasion of the Lava Men!" *X-Men* #4 "At last! The X-Men come face to face with the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants!" or the very first issue of *Daredevil*?

Didn't think so.



Deathlok debuts in *Astonishing Tales* #25 (Aug 1974). *Avengers* #5 (May 1964) features The Lava Men!

Pierre Comtois is a freelance writer and lives in Lowell, Ma. Currently, Pierre is involved in writing reviews and analyses of individual Marvel comics for The Silver Age Marvel Comics Cover Index. *Interested CBM readers can find the site using their Web browsers.*

Amazing Spider-Man #121 (Jun 1973) contains the death of Gwen Stacy

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COLOR GALLERY

Silver Surfer #5 (Apr 1969)

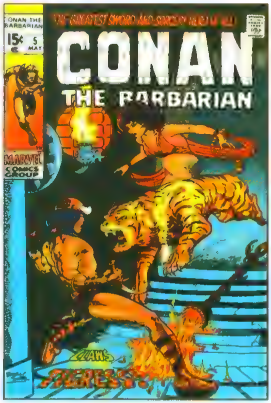
Fantastic Four #61 (Apr 1967)

Tales of Suspense #63 (Mar 1965)

Astonishing Tales #25 (Aug 1974) featuring "His Brother's Keeper" pencils by Neal Adams inks by Tom Palmer

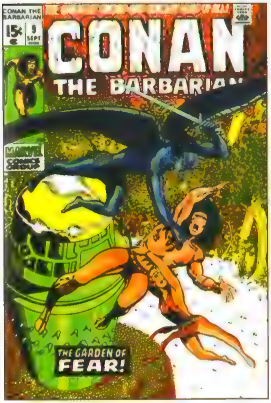
(SEE PAGE 28)

THE GREATEST SWORD-AND-SORCE
CONAN
THE BARBARIAN
DIE, MANLING! YOU ARE NO MATCH FOR THE POWER OF THE BEAST-MEN!
IN THE CAVERN WAITS DOOM!
MARVEL COMICS GROUP



Conan #2 (Dec 1970) "Lair of the Beast-Men!", #3 (Feb 1971) "The Twilight of the Grim Grey God!", #4 (Apr 1971) "The Tower of the Elephant!", #5 (May 1971) "Zukala's Daughter"

(SEE PAGES 4 & 34)



Conan #6 (Jun 1971) "Devil-Wings Over Shadizar!", #7 (Jul 1971) "The Lurker Within!", #9 (Sep 1971) "The Garden of Fear!", #10 (Oct 1971) "Beware the Wrath of Anu!"

(SEE PAGES 4 & 34)

TALES OF SUSPENSE
39
WHO? OR WHAT? IS THE NEWEST, MOST BREATH-TAKING, MOST SENSATIONAL SUPER-HERO OF ALL!
"IRON MAN!"
HE LIVES! HE WALKS! HE CONQUERS!
WHO?
WHO?
FROM THE TALENTED BULL-PEN WHERE THE FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDER-MAN, THOR AND YOUR OTHER FAVORITE SUPER HEROES WERE BORN!

TALES OF SUSPENSE
FEATURING AMERICA'S NEWEST SUPER-HERO SENSATION...
IRON MAN!
HIS SIZE ALONE DOES NOT WORRY ME! BUT THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE, SOME SINISTER SECRET BEHIND THE COMING OF GARGANTUS!

TALES OF SUSPENSE
41
WILL IRON MAN MEET HIS DOOM, WHEN HE BATTLES DR. STRONGHOLD OF DR. STRANGE!
NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL YOU ARE, IRON MAN, YOU'RE HELPLESS WITHOUT YOUR LIFE-GIVING ELECTRICITY! THE SAME ELECTRICITY WHICH I'M SHUTTING OFF—NOW!
DR. STRANGE... THE MOST MAGNETIC HERO EVER TO WALK THE IRON MAN'S ORBIT!

TALES OF SUSPENSE
39
HOLD YOUR BREATH! HERE COMES IRON MAN!
SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A DEADLY FOE OF IRON MAN LEARNS OF HIS REAL IDENTITY!!
IRON MAN... YOU'VE BLUNDERED INTO THE RED BARBARIAN'S TRAP! THIS IS YOUR FINISH!

Tales of Suspense
#39-42
(Mar-Jun 1963)

(SEE PAGE 22)

TALES OF
SUSPENSE
NEVER HAS MIGHTY IRON-MAN FACED SO DEADLY A FOE AS KALA, QUEEN OF NETHERWORLD!
EITHER BETRAY YOUR WORLD, IRON MAN, OR I WILL SLAY YOUR FRIENDS. THE CHOICE IS YOURS!
IF I SURRENDER, EARTH IS DOOMED! BUT IF I FIGHT HER, MY FRIENDS WILL DIE! WHAT CAN I DO?!

TALES OF
SUSPENSE
SUPER-THRILLS, SUPER-ACTION, SUPER-SUSPENSE, AS A FIGHTING MAN!
IRON MAN BATTLES THE LEGIONS OF THE MAD PHARAOH!
SEE IRON MAN FACE TO FACE WITH CLEOPATRA, QUEEN OF THE NILE!

TALES OF
SUSPENSE
THE ICY FINGERS OF JACK FROST ARE REACHING OUT FOR IRON MAN!
ONCE I SEAL YOU WITHIN MY UNBREAKABLE CUBE OF ICE, EVEN YOUR STRENGTH WILL BE USELESS TO YOU, IRON MAN!
Also in this GIANT ISSUE... INTRODUCING... PEPPER POTTS, and HAPPY HOGAN... DESTINED TO BECOME TWO OF YOUR FAVORITE SUPPORTING CHARACTERS!

TALES OF
SUSPENSE
MORE POWERFUL THAN IRON MAN! HOW CAN THE GOLDEN SUPER-HERO EVER DEFEAT THE CRIMSON DYNAMO?
IT IS TIME FOR ANTHONY STARK TO BECOME IRON MAN ONCE AGAIN!! I PRAY THIS WILL NOT BE MY FINAL BATTLE!

Tales of Suspense
#43-46
(Jul-Oct 1963)

(SEE PAGE 22)

Strange Tales
#148 (Sep 1966),
#150 (Nov 1966),
#152 (Jan 1967),
#154 (Mar 1967)

(SEE PAGE 56)

Strange Tales
#156 (May 1967),
#160 (Sep 1967),
#162 (Nov 1967),
#166 (Feb 1968)

(SEE PAGE 56)

STRANGE TALES
121
STARRING THE SENSATIONAL HUMAN TORCH
CO-STARRING: the MYSTICAL DOCTOR STRANGE!
THE TORCH BECOMES A PRISONER OF THE PLANTMAN!
ANOTHER MIGHTY MILESTONE IN THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS!
Dr. STRANGE in "WITCHCRAFT at the WAX MUSEUM"

STRANGE TALES
123
HE FLIES! HE FIGHTS! HE'S OUR NEWEST VILLAIN! The BEETLE! WAIT TILL YOU SEE HIM IN ACTION AGAINST the HUMAN TORCH!
Hey! LOOK WHO'S MENACING Dr. STRANGE! THAT'S RIGHT! IT'S NONE OTHER THAN THOR'S MOST DANGEROUS ENEMY, THE EVER-LOVIN' LOKI!
GUEST STARRING the one and only THING
IN LIVING COLOR!

STRANGE TALES
126
PAWNS OF THE DEADLY DUO!
ONCE AGAIN, THE DESPERATE HUMAN TORCH AND THE EVER-LIVING BLOCK-HEAD THING BECOME
featuring the menace of The MAD THINKER and his amazing PUPPET MASTER!
Dr. STRANGE in THE DOMAIN OF THE DEADLY DUO!

STRANGE TALES
128
WOW! I HAVE WE GOT A TREAT FOR YOU THIS ISSUE!
The SCARLET WITCH and The AMAZING QUICKSILVER. TWO OF THE X-MEN'S GREATEST FOES, GO INTO BREATH-TAKING ACTION AGAINST, naturally! THE TORCH and THE THING
Dr. STRANGE CAPTURED BY The DEMON'S DISCIPLE!

Strange Tales
#121 (Jun 1964),
#123 (Aug 1964),
#126 (Nov 1964),
#128 (Jan 1965)

(SEE PAGE 45)

THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC HAS... STRANGE IN ITS SPELL!

BY STEPHEN H. GENTNER

"MEN CALL HIM DR. STRANGE! NEVER HAVE YOU KNOWN HIS LIKE! IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE AND PRIVILEGE FOR THE EDITORS OF STRANGE TALES *TO PRESENT QUIETLY AND WITHOUT FANFARE, THE FIRST OF A NEW SERIES, BASED UPON A DIFFERENT KIND OF SUPERHERO—DR. STRANGE, MASTER OF BLACK MAGIC."*

YOU STRUGGLE TO GAIN TIME! YOU HOPE TO DISCOVER HOW I HAVE GAINED MY GREAT POWER, AND THUS FIND A WAY TO DEFEAT ME! BUT, YOUR TIME HAS RUN OUT, DR. STRANGE!

So begins the saga of Dr. Stephen Strange, Master of the Mystic Arts in *Strange Tales* #110 (July 1963). As the pre-hero Marvel titles resolved slowly over into super-powered characters, I was nine-years-old and had a front row seat. Having cut my teeth on *World's Finest*, *Flash*, *Adventure*, and *Fly*, Marvel's powerful emergence drew me in. I vividly remember loving *Fantastic Four* #5, Thor's *Journey Into Mystery*, and *Iron Man*. Into this fold then splashed Dr. Strange.

Strange Tales' transition to "super" was well under way when Dr. Strange debuted. Johnny Storm as the hot-headed teenage Torch had arrived with issue #101 (October 1962). Attempting to capitalize on the *Fantastic Four*'s enormous popularity, the "Four" visited frequently. To further spice the title up, Spider-Man became a nemesis/friend irritant to the Torch. Eventually, the Thing came on board to help float the boat a little longer. But what started as a toe-in-the-water back-up story to compliment Torch, resonated with the readers (and me) and thus began his ascent into prominence. The surprise success of Dr. Strange is noticeable, particularly when you look at the cover to *Strange Tales* #110. "Paste Pot Pete" flurching the Torch… Wow! What drama! What pathos! What angst! What a *waste*. Paste Pot was a throwback to a Fighting American miller, or even the *Fly* #1 adversary "Spider Spry." Had the Marvel editors realized what they had wrought, doubtless we could have had a KILLER Ditko debut cover. As it is, the book is devilish hard to find in grade. Its scarcity in condition is assured, but I wish they would have known (*sigh!*).

The mythos of Dr. Stephen Strange begins as that of a famous surgeon. Arrogant in his ability, and coldhearted in his demeanor, Dr. Strange would only work to cure his fellow man when paid. Fate deals him a curve when he crashes in his car, and survives to learn his hands tremble and he can never operate again. It is here he rejects the chance to teach his skills to other doctors, choosing rather to be a bum and a drifter. Petty and foolish, Strange slides down into depression. On the skids now and against the ropes, he overhears two men uttering a fantastic tale of an Ancient One in deepest India known to cure people. Latching onto this straw cast upon rough seas, Strange journeys to the "lonely vastness of Tibet," and finds the "Ancient One!"

"Heal me!" he cries, but the Ancient One tells him, no, he will only cure those "worthy," and to stick around awhile so he can determine if he is. Strange forces his point, and the AO puts the whammy on him! Only then, does Strange realize that black magic is real! As the weeks pass, Strange starts to study, perhaps to cure himself… all the while being observed and ridiculed by Mordo, the Ancient One's disciple. (Baron Mordo looks like the villain "Sandman," except with a really bad haircut.)

Strange learns of Mordo's plan to kill the Ancient One, and is discovered by

Mordo as he attempts to warn the AO. Bound and gagged by magic, Strange can't warn the AO, and realizes the depth of the evil threat Baron Mordo represents not only to the AO, but also to all humanity! Mordo's own words reveal him, "Why would you help men, when you might rule them." Reduced and shorn of his veneer of arrogance, selfishness, and greed, the metal is now ready to be shaped and molded.

Strange goes to the Ancient One and prays to become his disciple to learn the mystic arts, to stop Mordo and save the Ancient One. The AO accepts, and promptly removes the spell Mordo has cast! Strange is totally amazed yet the AO explains he keeps Mordo where he can see him to keep tabs on him… the "Master always aware of what the disciple is up to." Years pass… and Strange does learn.

It is interesting to note the way Dr. Strange's "powers" were used. With so many heroes, they flex their sinews or powers 'til sweat dampens their brow. The extent of their powers are in them, and they exert them accordingly. In contrast, the Dr. Strange series demonstrates a pronounced "learning curve" as disciple learns from master. The level of Dr. Strange's knowledge and competence evolved as each story passed. Strange "earned" his bonafides gradually rather than piece meal from a radioactive spider-bite, gamma-rays, a magic cane, or the mysterious Van Allen Belt. (Except Iron Man…)

The series of stories also manifests this transition of power/competence. Dr. Strange first battles his own foibles to earn the chance to learn. After that, he takes on the other disciple, Mordo… then onto Nightmare and others. Throughout this process, Strange learns from (and leans on) the unfathomable person and teachings of the Ancient One… that "raisinet" of a character. (Have you ever noticed you never see Aunt May and the Ancient One together at the same time? Have you noticed Peter Parker and Dr. Strange always need to get medicine for them both all the time? I think it's the same guy!…) (Poor Uncle Ben!) Before Yoda became "one" with the "force," the Ancient One's power and knowledge were at their zenith. Where Yoda vanished into a puff, the Ancient One nobly got absorbed into a tree! (Al Gore hugged him the other day, but I digress)!…

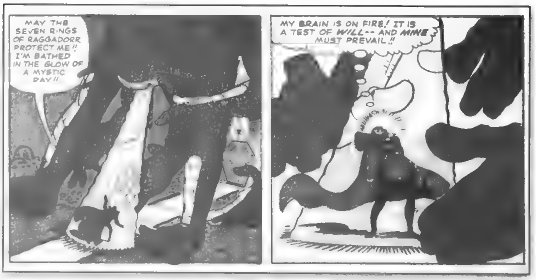
…BUT LET ME DETECT FURTHER DECAY OF THIS CIVILIZATION OF EARTH, AND I SHALL RETURN AND NEXT TIME MY POWER SHALL BE GREATER! I SHALL NOT UNDERESTIMATE YOU AGAIN!
SO BE IT! BUT FOR NOW, I ORDER YOU TO FREE YOUR PRISONERS!

Dr. Strange's occult prowess was enhanced by his wardrobe. Starting out with a simple blue tunic, sash, and wild orange gloves with black spots, his centerpiece article of dress was his mystic amulet. Worn about his neck, the amulet focused his mystic powers and became a vessel and portal to dimensions within dimensions. The amulet also popped out an "eye" which floated up and affixed itself on Dr. Strange's forehead! So configured, Strange could see through women's clothing!… no, but he could see invisible magic traces and other occult optometrically challenging objects (i.e. doors, footstools, dog toys, etc.).

You couldn't have a mystical hero without mystical prose. Just like Torch's "Flame On!," the Thing's "Clobberin' Time," or Sgt. Fury's "WAHOO!," Dr. Strange had his own ethereal exclamations (and more than one!). In fact, Stan Lee equipped Dr.

The covers of *Strange Tales* #122 (Jul 1964) & *Strange Tales* #118 (Mar 1964) gave barely a hint of the Ditko greatness inside

THE DREAD DORMAMMU!! MOST POWERFUL OF THE DWELLERS IN THE REALM OF DARKNESS!! WHAT DOES HE SEEK OF US?
HE THREATENS TO LEAVE THE DARK REALM--TO ENTER THE WORLD OF MAN! BUT THAT MUST NEVER BE!


MAY THE SEVEN RINGS OF RAGGADORR PROTECT ME!! I'M BATHED IN THE GLOW OF A MYSTIC DAY!!
MY BRAIN IS ON FIRE! IT IS A TEST OF WILL-- AND MIND MUST PREVAIL!!

Strange with a complete thesaurus of cryptic hyperbole... perhaps the best of all the Marvel Idiom! Here are some highlights:

By The Crimson Bonds of Cyttorak!
By the Crimson Circle of Cyttorak!
By the Hoary Hosts of Hoggoth!
By the Faultless Flames of the Faultine!
By the Vapors of Valtorr! (when in doubt always two Rs)
By the Powers of the Vishanti!
By the Mystic Moons of Munipor!
By the 12 Moons of Munipor!
By the Shades of the Seraphim!
By the All Seeing Eye of Agamotto!
By the Flocked Fez of Feliz... wait!...that can't be right?!

Anyway, you see what I mean (although I thought the "fez" thing was working...)! Perhaps all those storyline devices were just homages to Robin's "Holy Kitchen appliances, Batman!" rhetoric. In any case, when the ectoplasm hit the fan, Dr. Strange would lay one of his incantational icons on us and the game was afoot!

I have always wondered why so many alien races, interdimensional armies, mystic minions, and cosmic forces were so hell bent to have the Earth as their own? We were always so much insignificant dust to them anyway—heck, they told us that again and again! "Worthless humans, pitiful humans, wretched humans"—but they wanted us? (Maybe there was a housing shortage on Hoggoth or Munipor?...)

The progression of villains hit, in my opinion, its high point when the Dread Dormammes arrived. In quite a few of the stories leading up to his menacing threat, Dormammes name was invoked by Baron Mordo, Nightmare, the Ancient One and even Dr. Strange himself. The arrogance of the Dread Dormammes was a real problem for him. He admittedly had the power to snuff Dr. Strange out like a match, yet was unable to exert the correct killing blow due to Dr. Strange's wily use of deception and spell. Strange had to. He was over his head!

It developed that Dormammes had long ago met the Ancient One, and that the AO had escaped back here to Earth. As for whatever reason, Dormammes didn't follow, yet Dormammes first disciple remembered the Ancient One. This nameless disciple had a daughter who helps Strange several times and we eventually find out she is Clea. Clea was Dr. Strange's interdimensional squeeze, whom much later he marries. The attraction between them was immediate. Dormammes first battle with Dr. Strange occurs in the two-parter in *ST* #126 and 127.

"Even the Ancient One, at the height of his powers could not defeat him!" This to me is the definitive story and plot of the character. Dormammes is, in fact, the protector, and "Most Powerful of the Dwellers in the Realm of Darkness." Dormammes protects (by magic barrier) his realm from creatures known as the "Mindless Ones." They are a "rock" looking group with Jort beams coming out their heads. All they do is fight, and never stop. During the fracas with Dr. Strange, the Mindless Ones escape due to the effort to destroy Strange. Thus weakened, Dormammes needs Strange's help to stop them and save the Dark Realm. Dormammes is in Strange's debt—which precludes him from destroying Strange or coming over to our dimension. To say Dormammes is bummed out is putting it mildly... you really should check this out.

AS THE MELTING OF ICEBERGS BEFORE THE POWER OF THE SUN, TIBORO'S SPELL FADES INTO SHEER NOTHINGNESS!
I SURVIVE, MONSTROUS ONE! THE OWN POTENT FORCE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS STRONGER THAN THE POWERS OF EVIL! HAVE YOU HAD ENOUGH PROOF?

By the end of issue #127, all the elements are in place from all the preceding issues. We find that Dr. Strange's ectoplasmic self can only live outside his human meat shell for 24 hours (à la Larry Trainor and Negative Man in DC's *Doom Patrol*). Where once a ring the Ancient One gave Strange allowed physical attributes to the ectoplasmic self, that disappears (as a plot element forever). We also know that Dr. Strange won't kill anyone, and also will never turn anyone away who needs help.

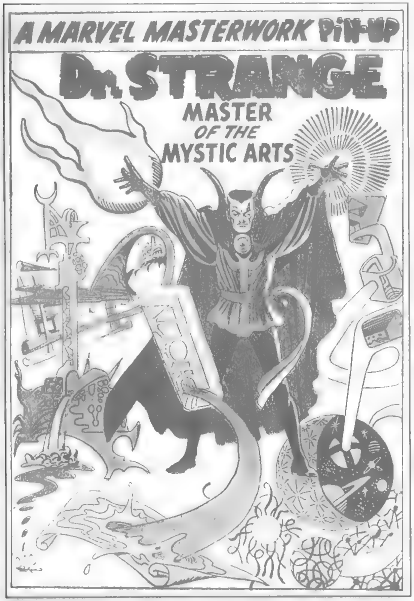
And lastly, due to Dr. Strange's triumph over Dormammes, the Ancient One is freed from a spell on him from Dormammes which makes him spry (for a while anyway). In honor of this triumph, the AO gives Dr. Strange the red cloak of levitation, and an "improved," "more wondrous" amulet. From this point (#127) on, the Dread Dormammes has it in for Dr. Strange. The bitter taste of defeat absolutely undoes Dormammes. Fixating

With a style totally unique among Silver Age artists, Steve Ditko's work on Dr. Strange is considered by many collectors to be the zenith of his work at Marvel. In the pin-up below, Ditko perfectly communicates with mystical forms and etheral shapes!

on Dr. Strange to distraction leads Dormammes to a final showdown (of sorts) with Eternity in issue #146. I won't spoil it for you, check it out, the whole thing is wonderful!

What makes this occult concept work is the genius of Steve Ditko and Stan Lee, whose run with this character goes from #110 through 146. Frank Brunner, Bill Everett, and Gene Colan do yeoman service to the brand, but in my mind Ditko's interpretation is the definitive one. The power circles around Ditko's patented finger positions are too tasty! The creepy, eerie effects Ditko generates comes from a wealth of pre hero Marvel stories and experience. We are the beneficiaries of that experience, and this run transports you to dimensions as vast as your mind can hold… with Dr. Strange there to protect you.

Special thanks to Matt Hoffman for providing the Doctor Strange graphics for this article.



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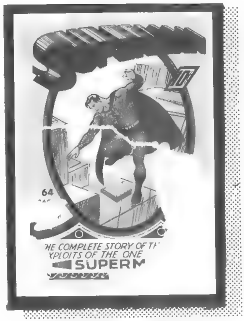

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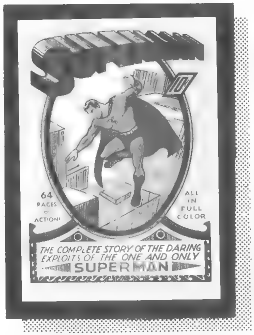

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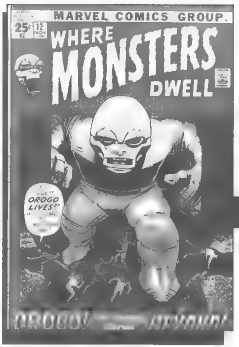
Matthew Wilson, Conservator

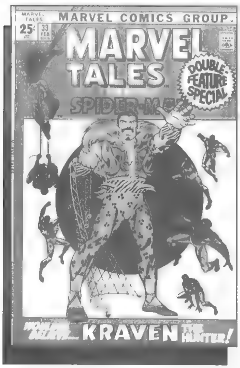
Giant-Sized for a Month? The really-weird periodicity puzzle of some Bronze Age Marvel Giants.



mid-run Marvel

By Rolf Brown

In October 1971, Marvel Comics began the process of restructuring the pricing of their entire line… the result was a complex mix of different prices, page counts, and publication schedules. Since August 1969 Marvel comics had been priced at 15¢ a copy except for a few giant-size reprints. Instead of simply increasing the cover price to 20¢, Marvel announced (on the bullpen page) that in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the publication of *Fantastic Four* #1 and the birth of the Marvel Age of comics, the entire line would be giant-sized for a month. The giant-sizes would cost 25¢ a book, a better per page deal than before, the editors assured us. However, on the letters pages of some titles there appeared the well worn discussion of paper costs and the need for an increase. These disparate messages point to a hasty decision to run a series of giant-sized issues.



Additional signs point to some confusion at Marvel and a struggle to adjust to the announced changes. A case in point is some October issues… some were 15¢ and others were 25¢. Also some November issues carried a 25¢ cover price while still other November issues were priced at 20¢. The two-month spread makes sense if one considers Marvel released different titles on different weeks of the month.

It appears that the decision was rushed in order to get some issues out during the Fantastic Four's anniversary month. October weeks three and four and November weeks one and two were released as giants. This explains the titles released on a monthly basis, but for bimonthly titles it was a little more complicated. If the bimonthly title's scheduled publication window fell in October (e.g. *Astonishing Tales*) there was a giant. If the bimonthly title's scheduled publication window fell in November (e.g. *Amazing Adventures*) no giant-size was ever produced.

In the case of the books published on a quarterly schedule (and already being produced as 68 and 72 page giants), the Fall issue was published as planned and the Winter (January to March) issue had the page count reduced to 52 pages. It is interesting to note that the issue after the page reduction these giant-sized reprint books joined the ranks of the standard sized giant-size 20¢ titles.

Several new quarterly titles were started in this period, for instance *Marvel Spotlight* #1 published in November 1971 was a 15¢ issue, but the second issue dated February 1972 was priced at 25¢. The other title in this category is *Marvel Feature*, a tryout book initially featuring the Defenders.

Marvel Feature's first issue came out in December 1971 and the second issue was dated March 1972. Both books were 25¢ giants and have original content. *Marvel Triple Action* (a semi-annual according to the indicia) saw its first issue in February 1972 with a 25¢ price. . with subsequent issues priced at 20¢ (the first of these appearing in May).

A number of titles had two giant-sized issues for which there is no universal explanation, although it does appear that titles which had two giants did not have an annual. The titles that fall into this category are: *Conan* #10 and 11, *Rawhide Kid* #92 and 93, *Monsters on the Prowl* #13 and 14, as well as several quarterly titles. Of these *Conan*, *The Rawhide Kid*, and the quarterly *Marvel Feature* contain an original story. *The Rawhide Kid*

GIANTS

did have a King Size Special dated September 1971 before the regular series giants. Outside the regular series Marvel also produced a series of King Sized Specials for many of their titles spanning this same time period, but with the exception of *Rawhide Kid*, not for titles that had two regular series giants. In some cases such as *Chili* and *Tower of Shadows*, a special was published without a regular series. In the case of the *Tower of Shadows* the regular series had ended in January 1971 and the King Size Special was published in December of that year. Chili's regular title was in abeyance from September 1970 until August of 1972, her special was published in December 1971 I expect many fans found this publication schedule a little confusing.

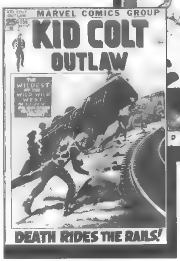
Of these interesting issues, my favorite is *Avengers* #93, a cover to cover Neal Adams masterpiece involving Ant-Man going inside the android Vision to effect a repair (à la *Fantastic Voyage*). This scenario allowed Adams to create an incredible alien terrain, which is as fresh and original today as when I first opened this book a quarter century ago. In second place is *Amazing Spider-Man* #102, a great Roy Thomas story drawn by Gil Kane and featuring a battle royal between Morbius, The Lizard, and Spider-Man. The book length story includes having Spidey grow two additional sets of arms and is great fun.

Also in this series of giants are the first appearances of The Defenders in *Marvel Feature* and Werewolf by Night in *Marvel Spotlight*. Although by no means Marvel's first Werewolf (who can forget the Atlas classic *Menace* #3) but it does signal a return to original horror which Marvel would produce for the rest of the 1970s. For that reason alone it is an important book. For sheer fun, *My Love* #14 takes the cake and features the Woodstock Rock Festival and a broken heart. Nuff said!

When first starting this research project I felt that I had little more to do than pull the respective issues from the collection and figure out what had happened. But as I constructed a list of books that would have to be checked for a thorough coverage of the period it became clear that this was a larger task than I had planned on. A whole slew of western and reprint titles needed to be found, and as it turned out, they were unexpectedly difficult to obtain. Rare? I doubt it. Valuable? Not likely. In demand and bloody difficult to actually put one's hands on? You bet.

Condition is often rough for the non-superhero issues... especially the westerns and some of the reprints. Which are the toughest? Probably *My Love* #14, *Our Love Story* #13, *Millie the Model* #192, *Sgt. Fury* #91, and *Outlaw Kid* #8 (although I suspect all the westerns are tough, I just happened to have collected them years ago.) And in fact, after reviewing some old lists, it appears that *Daredevil* #81 was one of the last issues I obtained in that title

It would be interesting if someone who worked at Marvel in this period could shed some additional light on their thinking... at least enough to help collectors better understand the really strange periodicity puzzle of some Bronze Age Marvel Giants.



Rolf Brown, a Marvel zombie since 1970, has also been seen acquiring ACGs on occasion. To pay for his hobby, he works as a librarian for the city of Tempe, Arizona.

Marvel Giant Size

In the spring of 1974, Marvel Comics tried something new: giant-sized books. These were a series of 68-page comics covering the entire range of their output. Marvel had always published annuals and occasionally a giant size in a regular run… such as the great Neal Adams Avengers #93. But a run of 69 giant-sized books was unprecedented for Marvel and the series continued until the winter of 1975. For me this Bronze Age run was Marvel's high water mark, arriving on the stands during my most enthusiastic childhood collecting years. At the time I was focused on superheroes and passed on the horror titles, but when Spider-Man, Fantastic Four, and Avengers showed up, I begged tolerant parents for the funds to acquire these treasures.

The real prize was *Giant-Size Avengers* #1—reintroducing the Whizzer and Miss America from the Timely era. The following issues of the Avengers Giant-Size continued an incredible Steve Englehart story arc from the regular series that brought in characters from all over the Marvel universe. The use of Kang (a time traveling despot) even allowed Hawkeye to visit the old west and add the Marvel western characters to the continuity (Engelhart later did this with Patsy Walker). The death of the Swordsman occurs in *Giant-Size Avengers* #2. The Swordsman was a pretty lame superhero, his only "power" a sword with buttons on it that shot different colored rays. The marriage of the Vision and the Scarlet Witch in the fourth issue is worth a look. This is a strange union as the Vision is an android… on the other hand Wanda was a bit of a cold fish, so it may well have been the perfect match.

The series started with new titles: *Super Heroes Featuring Spider-Man; Super-Stars* (featuring a Thing vs. Hulk story); *Chillers* (Dracula); and *Creatures* (Wolfman). And according to Marv Wolfman, they planned *Monsters* (which would have featured Manthing). At some point the decision was made to conform to the existing title structure and *Monsters* was released as *Giant-Size Manthing* #1. *Super-Stars* continued as *Giant-Size Fantastic Four* #2 and *Super Heroes* restarted as *Spider-Man* with #1. *Giant-Sized Dracula* #2 continued what *Chillers* had started, featuring great Gene Colan art and *Werewolf* picked up where *Creatures* left off. The following year another *Giant-Sized Chillers* #1 came out, just to confuse things a little.

Many other significant events occurred in these books. First and foremost is the introduction of the New X-Men in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1. This book is the most expensive in the series and introduces Storm, Colossus, and Nightcrawler, and features Wolverine's second or fourth appearance (depending whether one counts *Hulk* #180 and #182 as appearances). Anyway, *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 is one of the most important books in the pantheon of key Marvel comics.

Giant-Size Creatures #1 introduces Tigra, originally "the Cat." She is transformed into a were-creature to save her life. This is a fun issue and spotlights an interesting figure. Initially an assertive feminist as The Cat and a fairly strong female character overall, she undergoes an even stranger transformation in later years when she becomes a member of Avengers. Regrettably, lazy writers turn Tigra into a vamp for comic relief… she even propositions Jarvis, the Avengers' elderly butler!

In *Giant-Size Conan* #1-4, Robert E. Howard's "Hour of the Dragon" is adapted very successfully by Roy Thomas, Gil Kane, and Tom Sutton. These issues have great sword and sorcery action from the genre's 1970's heyday. Issue #1 also features the first appearance of Belit, Conan's future lover and companion. It took me three close re-reads of *Giant-Size Conan* #1 to find this obscure reference to Belit as a blonde! Additionally, these issues reprint early Barry Smith Conan stories.

"Howard the Duck" by Frank Brunner appears in *Giant-Size Manthing* #4 and 5. These issues were once in very high demand because of the brief popularity… and a speculative interest in… Howard the Duck after the release of his own title. The two stories are a cross between camp and horror, and, with the Brunner art, a very interesting story results. In issue #4, Howard faces Garko the Man-Frog and in #5, in what must be one of Marvel's most off beat stories, "Bessie the Vampire Cow" (whew). It seems Dracula stopped off on an Ohio farm for a drink and left behind a bovine member of the undead that howls… er moos… at the moon.

The *Giant-Size* run also included more traditional Marvel fare, such as the first appearance of the Invaders featuring Timely heroes fighting evil-doers and Nazis in the 1940s (drawn in a simpler Golden Age style by Frank Robbins). *Giant-Size Invaders* #1 also includes the origin of Captain America and starts off the fun series that was to run for 41 issues and an annual (with a Schomberg cover). Also originating from the *Giant-Size* series was the Super-Villain Team-Up, a tightly written story arc featuring Sub-Mariner and Dr. Doom through the first 10 of 15 issues.

Overall these great books are still available and affordable even in higher grades, but it may take a while to assemble an entire set. The *Spider-Man* issues are more expensive due to Morbius and Dracula appearances and the third Punisher showing. I would guess that the *Marvel Triple Action* and the *Kid Colt* issues are the hardest to find. Due to the thickness of these books, the top and bottom corners on the spine are often damaged… even on otherwise clean copies.

These great books provide an excellent snap-shot of Marvel in mid-course. Timely revivals and reprints show where they've been… and the new X-Men introduction lights the path ahead.

NOTE 1: *Millie the Model* was published in two queen-sized issues during this period. From the standpoint of the overall publishing schedule of the giant-sized issues, it appears that Millie should also be included.

NOTE 2: I don't own a copy of *Marvel's Greatest*, but I assume it follows suit with the rest of the issues.

Marvel Giant Size

Avengers
#1 (Aug 1974)
#2 (Nov 1974)
#3 (Feb 1975)
#4 (Jun 1975)
#5 (Dec 1975)

Captain America
#1 (Dec 1975)

Chillers
#1 (Jun 1974)

Chillers
#1 (Feb 1975)
#2 (May 1975)
#3 (Aug 1975)

Conan
#1 (Sep 1974)
#2 (Feb 1974)
#3 (Apr 1975)
#4 (Jun 1975)
#5 (1975)

Creatures
#1 (May 1974)

Daredevil
#1 (1975)

Defenders
#1 (Jul 1974)
#2 (Oct 1974)
#3 (Jan 1975)
#4 (Apr 1975)
#5 (Jul 1975)

Doc Savage
#1 (1975)

Doctor Strange
#1 (Nov 1975)

Dracula
#2 (Sep 1974)
#3 (Dec 1974)
#4 (Mar 1975)
#5 (Jun 1975)

Hulk
#1 (1975)

Invaders
#1 (Jun 1975)

Iron Man
#1 (1975)

Kid Colt
#1 (Jan 1975)
#2 (Apr 1975)
#3 (Jul 1975)

Man-Thing
#1 (Aug 1974)
#2 (Nov 1974)
#3 (Feb 1975)
#4 (May 1975)
#5 (Aug 1975)

Marvel Triple Action
#1 (May 1975)
#2 (Jul 1975)

Master of Kung-Fu
#1 (Sep 1974)
#2 (Dec 1974)
#3 (Mar 1975)
#4 (Jun 1975)

Power Man
#1 (1975)

Spider-Man
#1 (Jul 1974)
#2 (Oct 1974)
#3 (Jan 1975)
#4 (Apr 1975)
#5 (Jul 1975)
#6 (Sep 1975

Super-Heroes Featuring Spider-Man
#1 (Jun 1974)

Super-Stars
#1 (May 1974)

Super-Villain Team-Up
#1 (Mar 1975)
#2 (Jun 1975)

Thor
#1 (Jul 1975)

Werewolf
#2 (Oct 1974)
#3 (Jan 1975)
#4 (Apr 1975)
#5 (Jul 1975)

X-Men
#1 (Sum 1975)
#2 (Nov 1975)

CHECKLIST NOTE:
Millie the Model was published in two "queen-sized" issues during this period. From the standpoint of the overall publishing schedule of the giant-sized issues, it appears that Millie should also be included.

Highlights from the 1975 Giant Series

Giant-Size Avengers #3 is written by Steve Englehart and Roy Thomas… and drawn by Dave Cockrum. Avengers verses Kang and Baron Zemo with many other characters from all over the Marvel universe. Together with Giant-Size Avengers #2 and the regular Avengers issues, this is one of Marvel's best story arcs. For a real treat read from issue #129-149 to catch some of Steve Engelhart's best work, not mention some great George Perez artwork.

Giant-Size Conan #1-4 contains an adaptation of Robert E. Howard's work "The Hour of the Dragon" by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane.

Giant-Size Chillers #1 "The Curse of Dracula" is written by Marv Wolfman and drawn by Gene Colan. In it, we meet Dracula's daughter for the first time. This one features Marvel horror at its best and also includes Marv Wolfman's essay "Keeping Track of Drac!"

Giant-Sized Creatures #1 is written by Tony Isabella and drawn by Don Perlin. This issue features "Werewolf by Night" and the origin of Tigra.

Giant-Size Defenders #3 is written by Steve Gerber, Jim Starlin, and Len Wein… and drawn by Dan Adkins, Don Newton and Jim Mooney. This issue has a cosmic tale of the Defenders, plus Daredevil pitted against the Grandmaster.

Giant-Size Invaders #1 is written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Frank Robbins. Start of a super group featuring an assortment of Timely heroes. The first issue contains Captain America, Bucky, Human Torch, Toro and the Sub-Mariner. The regular series went on to include the entire Timely stable.

Giant-Size Man-Thing #4 and 5 contains Steve Gerber and Frank Brunner Howard the Duck stories in both of these books… as well as a full-length Manthing story and Ditko reprints.

Giant-Size Super-Heroes Featuring Spider-Man #1 is written by Gerry Conway and drawn by Gil Kane. Spider-Man takes on two old adversaries… Morbius, Living Vampire and J. Jonah Jameson's son (the Man-Wolf) combined with the usual complications stemming from Peter Parker's personal life.

Giant-Size Spider-Man #1 is written by Len Wein and drawn by Ross Andru. It features Spider-Man vs. Dracula at sea with a technical assist from the Human Torch.

Giant-Size X-Men #1 is a Bronze Age key and features the first appearance of the new X-Men by Len Wein and Dave Cockrum. Was this one really on the stands twenty-five years ago?!

Marvel's 52-Page 25 centers!

by William Alexander

When DC changed their cover price to 25¢ and their format to 52 pages in the 1971, Marvel was not far behind in following the trend. Beginning on regular sized comics cover dated October 1971, Marvel also changed the price on and the format of comics ... just two months after DC. The only noticeable difference to collectors was that Marvel chose to make their new giant sized line square bound rather than round bound as DC had done. The following checklist of 57 Marvel 52-Page, 25¢ Giant Size Format Comics Books contains all square bound books except (amazingly) four. These odd, seemingly unexplainable, round bound format comics are *Captain America Special* #2 (Jan 1972), *Mighty Marvel Western* #15 (1971), *Monsters On The Prowl* #13 (1971), and *My Love* #14 (Nov 1971). As far as I can tell, Marvel Comics did not intentionally produce any additional giant size comics in the round bound format until years later, about 1980.

A CBM CHECKLIST

MARVEL 52-PAGE 25¢ GIANT-SIZE FORMAT COMIC BOOKS

(Dec 1970-Mar 1972)

Compiled by Bill Alexander with the helpful assistance of Terry Holmes, Jon McClure, and Doug Sulipa.
The list includes Overstreet GD, FN, & NM values from Price Guide #30.

Amazing Spider-Man #102 (Nov 1971)	$8.50	$28.50	$85
Astonishing Tales #8 (Oct 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$20
Avengers #93 (Nov 1971)	$5	$15	$55
Avengers Special #5 (Jan 1972)	$1.85	$5.50	$15
Captain America #143 (Nov 1971)	$1.25	$3.75	$10
Captain America Special #2 (Jan 1972)	$1.75	$5.25	$14
Chamber Of Darkness Special #1 (Jan 1972)	$2.50	$7.50	$22
Chili Special #1 (Dec 1971)	$3	$9	$30
Conan The Barbarian #10 (Oct 1971)	$4.20	$12.60	$42
Conan The Barbarian #11 (Nov 1971)	$4.20	$12.60	$42
Daredevil #81 (Nov 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$20
Daredevil Special #2 (Feb 1971)	$1.25	$3.75	$10
Daredevil Special #3 (Jan 1972)	$1.25	$3.75	$10
Fantastic Four #116 (Nov 1971)	$2	$6	$18
Fear #5 (Nov 1971)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Fear #6 (Feb 1972)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Incredible Hulk #145 (Nov 1971)	$1.50	$4.50	$12
Incredible Hulk Special #4 (Jan 1972)	$1.85	$5.50	$15
Iron Man #43 (Nov 1971)	$1.85	$5.50	$15
Iron Man Special #2 (Nov 1971)	$1.50	$4.50	$12
Kid Colt #156 (Nov 1971)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Mad About Millie Annual #1 (Nov 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$22
Marvel Feature #1 (Dec 1971)	$9.50	$29	$105
Marvel Feature #2 (Mar 1972)	$5	$15	$55
Marvels Greatest Comics #34 (Mar 1972)	$2	$6	$16
Marvel Spotlight #2 (Feb 1972)	$10.50	$31	$115
Marvel Tales #33 (Feb 1972)	$2	$6	$16
Marvel Triple Action #1 (Feb 1972)	$1.85	$4.50	$15
Mighty Marvel Western #15 (Dec 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$22
Mighty Marvel Western #16 (Mar 1972)	$2.50	$7.50	$22
Millie The Model #192 (Oct 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$20
Millie The Model Annual #10 (Nov 1971)	$5.50	$16.50	$55
Monsters On The Prowl #13 (Oct 1971)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Monsters On The Prowl #14 (Dec 1971)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
My Love #14 (Nov 1971)	$2.80	$8.40	$28
My Love Special #1 (Dec 1971)	$2.80	$8.40	$28
Our Love Story #13 (Oct 1971)	$2.80	$8.40	$28
Outlaw Kid #8 (Oct 1971)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Rawhide Kid #92 (Oct 1971)	$2.60	$7.80	$26
Rawhide Kid #93 (Nov 1971)	$2.60	$7.80	$26
Ringo Kid #12 (Nov 1971)	$2.50	$7.50	$20
Sgt. Fury #92 (Oct 1971)	$2	$6	$16
Sgt. Fury Special #7 (Nov 1971)	$1.50	$4.50	$12
Special Marvel Edition #4 (Feb 1972)	$1.75	$5.25	$14
Sub-Mariner #43 (Nov 1971)		$2.40	$6
Sub-Mariner Special #2 (Jan 1972)	$1	$3	$8
Thor #193 (Nov 1971)	$4	$12	$40
Thor Special #4 (Dec 1971)	$1.25	$3.75	$10
Tower Of Shadows Special #1 (Dec 1971)	$1.85	$5.50	$15
Western Gunfighters #7 (Jan 1972)	$2.25	$6.75	$18
Where Monsters Dwell #12 (Nov 1971)	$2	$6	$16
X-Men #67 (Dec 1971)	$3.20	$9.60	$32
X-Men #68 (Feb 1971)	$3.20	$9.60	$32
X-Men #69 (Apr 1971)	$3.20	$9.60	$32
X-Men #70 (Jun 1971)	$3.20	$9.60	$32
X-Men #72 (Oct 1971)	$3.20	$9.60	$32
X-Men Special #2 (Nov 1971)	$5	$15	$55

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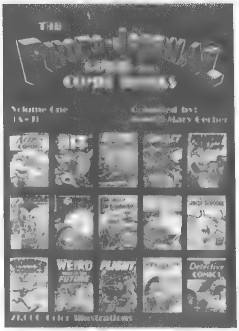

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STRANGE AS IT

DOC'S NEW INCARNATION IN STRANGE

BY MYLS PUTMAN

With the closing pages of *Strange Tales* #146, the era constituting the formative chapters in the history of Dr. Strange, by the original creators—Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, had truly ended ("The End—At Last!"). Ditko had since departed Marvel by the time this issue hit the stands. Lee, faced with an expanding lineup of titles, had less time available to devote to writing on this (and other) series. The key challenges faced by Marvel at this juncture were to find the right creative team who could keep the storyline fresh and exciting. As if to foreshadow the cliffhanger endings to come, the announcement in the "next ish" blurb of the letters column of a new series artist also added that no one in the staff knew who it would be, leaving readers with an interlude of mystery.

The Dr. Strange saga in *Strange Tales* #147 starts with the mundane—a trek to the neighborhood pharmacy for aspirin, and by the time it's over in *ST* #168, the Ancient One is killed off (and brought back to life again!); Clea was again consigned to the inter-dimensional voids while Mordo temporarily returned to Earth; a new potential romantic interest was brought on line from the past; the Sanctum got trashed twice; and Dr. Strange had faced off against the likes of an omnipotent cosmic judge, a super-scientist, and (gulp!) Dormammu's *sister*. New villains with names like Kaluu, Umar and Zom harkened back to the days of the pre-hero Marvel monster anthology stories, while a surprisingly coherent story sequence was woven from an ongoing succession of different artists and writers.

The series is readily divided into three major segments—the battle against Kaluu (*ST* #147-150), the struggle against Umar and its direct aftermath (*ST* #150-163), and the rescue of Victoria Bentley, precipitating the conflict with the super-scientist Yandroth (*ST* #164-168). The middle sequence can be further divided into the initial encounter with Umar and the Zom-Living Tribunal-Mordo-Nebulos, with the ending in issue #155 as the dividing point. Following *Strange Tales* issue #168, the series title changed to *Dr. Strange* with issue #169 (June 1969), maintaining the continuity in issue numbering, while former *Strange Tales* series partner Nick Fury appeared in the first issue of his own title that same month.

Strange Tales #147-150

Starting off with the arrival of artist Bill Everett, the splash page in "From the Nameless Nowhere Comes .. Kaluu!" (#147, August 1966) opens with Dr. Strange pondering his "relaxing tour of everyday shopping" in Greenwich Village. Co-scripted by Lee and Denny O'Neil, "...Kaluu!" includes a touch of humor in DS' exchange with his pharmacist about his absence while battling Dormammu and Mordo ("On vacation?" "Oh, I wouldn't call it that") and his checking on a lead for booking as a nightclub act. His reaction to Wong's worries about money to bring the Sanctum into compliance with Building Code is sharp rebuke, ordering his servant to the Vault and to sell the "trinkets" therein for money. Following a flash-

back sequence of the previous dozen issues or more, via the Crystal of Agamotto, the action really gets going towards the end. Dr. Strange is able to thwart an armed robbery at the pharmacy, but cannot prevent the Book of the Vishanti from being stolen by the "creature" Kaluu (as dubbed by the Ancient One), who is able to turn emotions into pure mystical energy.

Kaluu is revealed to have been a former comrade of Strange's elder mentor, as readers were treated to "The Origin of the Ancient One" in *Strange Tales* #148 (September 1966). The Ancient one rebukes Strange's intent on immediate counter-attack in "If Kaluu Should Triumph..." (#149, October 1966) as he employs an initially passive and ultimately evasive defense. Both hold fast in the Sanctum, where Strange's power is strongest, against hordes of demons conjured up by Kaluu, and then journey back in time, to where Kaluu had consigned the Book of Vishanti in #150. Issue #149 also contains one of the few non-rhyming spells made by Dr. Strange (page 7). For the concept of using candles for traveling back in time, the writers reached back into the past as well (specifically *Strange Tales* #124)—it would be the first of several story elements to be unearthed from the early Lee/Ditko adventures. The final showdown is between Kaluu and Strange, as the Ancient One, using words that would foreshadow the events in #157, tells Stephen "For one day you will face the mystic hordes of evil alone... and for that time you must ever prepare!" Kaluu is consigned to the recesses of Limbo by his own spell of permanent suspended animation, via the "mightiest use" of the sacred Book, and would not be heard from again until *Strange Tales* (second series) #8 (November 1987).

The linkage of Kaluu with the overall story arc is cemented in the pages of *Strange Tales* #148, where the battle between Dormammu and Eternity, shattered the barriers holding Kaluu in exile in the dimension of Raggadorr (in addition to releasing Umar as well). Following Kaluu's defeat in "The Conquest of Kaluu!" (#150, November 1966), scripted by Roy Thomas, readers are then introduced in the final pages to Umar the Unrelenting, sister of the Dread Dormammu. The final panel, with its chiaroscuro design, symbolically portrays the potent menace that Dreaded One's sibling posed.

Strange Tales #150-163

Following the preview of Umar's coming (and a quick change from a green robe to a red one), "Umar Strikes!" (#151, December 1966) echoes the flashback sequence of #147, only this time it is Dormammu's sister who is viewing past events, including the defeat of Kaluu, through the Lamp of Lucifer. With Stan Lee returning to the scripting, the old issue of money rears its head again in Strange's life, this time to repair the damage caused by Kaluu. This time, as observed by Umar, Dr. Strange merely conjures up gold bars (to be exchanged for currency), and orders Wong not to speak of such "mundane" matters again. The trinkets in the vault (#147), nor the Vault

SEEMS!

TALES #147-168

for that matter, were neither mentioned again either. This inconsistency in Lee's script was noted by an alert reader in the letter column of #154, although no plausible explanation was offered.

Strange Tales #160 (Sep 1967) features the first of two Raymond Marais scripts and the return of Victoria Bentley, a "neophyte" British mystic who first appeared in *Strange Tales* #114 (Nov 1963)

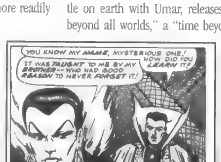
Incidentally, in that issue's Bullpen Bulletins page was the blurb on Lee's decision to resume writing chores, for the reason that he "couldn't resist" working with Bill Everett on the series. However, this creative team-up would last only two issues.

By observing Strange's victories over Dormammu, Umar swears vengeance in spite of Dormammu's past treatment of her. Clea becomes the target of her wrath, being thrown back into "the Void which exists between dimensions!" The silver-haired one summarizes her situation in the most level headed manner "Once again, I am helplessly buffeted by a power I cannot fathom—a force beyond my comprehension!" (page 9), whereas one might have more readily expected "ARRGHHH!!!"Not Again!!!!!"

Using Clea's "voice" as a lure, Umar forces Dr. Strange onto her turf—the Dark Dimension ("Into the Dimension of Death!," *Strange Tales* #152, January 1967). As Strange gradually draws closer, he is abducted by two spirit-forms conjured by Umar. His reaction is a classic of Stan Lee's alliterative writing style: "Sinister spirits—solidified and silent! Twin harbingers of horrendous hate!" Likewise, the Dark Dimension is alternately called the "Nether Dimension," and "the Nameless Dimension of Doom!" (page 1). Dr. Strange may have battled female adversaries before, such as the raven-tressed "Fair One" in *ST* #143, but none as cunning and stealthy as Umar, with power equal to that of her brother. Dr. Strange ultimately falls for her deception as he attempts to rescue "Clea" in "Alone, Against the Mindless Ones!" (#153, February 1967). It was this issue that saw the debut of Marie Severin as series artist, following a display of her artwork created exclusively for a feature on Marvel Comics that appeared in the latest issue of *Esquire* magazine. Appropriately enough, Umar's robes change back to green. This issue of *Strange Tales* also marked the artistic debut of Jim Steranko on the companion series, Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Strange's counterattack in "Clea Must Die" (#154, March 1967) employs the Spirit entity known as Veritas (truth) as an ally, engaging her in a psychological attack as readers were treated to a glimpse of Umar's real appearance. She becomes so enraged that she hurls a death-spell towards Clea in the closing panel of the issue, again, as in the previous episode, gaining the upper hand. However, Strange is able to arrive at the place of Clea's consignment to protect her from Umar's spell in "The Fearful Finish" (#155, April 1967), and then embarks upon a flight through "the Forbidden Dimensions—through which none may survive!", barely staying one step ahead of the Unrelenting One. Stan Lee's scripts revealed these regions to include the "Dreaded Inter-Dimensional Road of Repetition" (page 4); and the "Realm of Non-Existence" (page 4-5). The two arrive on earth with a timely assist from the Ancient One, who then turns and banishes both from the planet! For Dr. Strange, this is but a temporary period of isolation, but Clea is dispatched to the nether regions (for her own safety) via the Spell of Vanishment, along with the parchment upon which the spell is written. The Ancient One explains to his pupil that, essentially, all bets are off, because Umar has chosen to invade the Earth.

From here the series' emotional intensity get ratcheted up. In "Umar Walks the Earth!" (*Strange Tales* #156, May 1967), we get no conclusive showdown. Instead, it opens the door to a quick succession of one new threat supplanting another in a series of cliffhanger endings that lead to the Living Tribunal's judgment against the earth in "The End of the Ancient One (#157, June 1967). The Ancient One, in anticipation of his battle on earth with Umar, releases Dr. Strange into a "World beyond all worlds," a "time beyond all time," to release the entity known as "Zom" from the "Legendary Amphora." Meanwhile, Umar (now clad in an aqua colored robe) outdoes Kaluu by leveling the entire Sanctum with but a mere gesture, before engaging Strange's mentor in battle at Stonehenge. Strange leads the uncontrollable Zom across the dimensions right towards Umar. She discovers her magic has dissipated by those of Zom, who has an old score to settle with the Faltinians (Dormammu and Umar). Umar hastily departs but "the mighty Zom must ever have his victim," who, in the next issue, is the Ancient One. Joining the crew on this issue was inker Herb Trimpe, whose joining of the Marvel staff was announced in


YOU KNOW MY NAME, MYSTERIOUS ONE! IT HAS TAUGHT TO ME BY MY BROTHER--WHO HAD GOOD REASON TO NEVER FORGET IT!
NOW, DID YOU LEARN IT?
YOUR BROTHER?

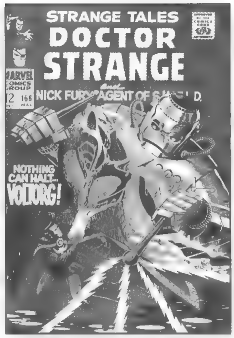
that issue's Bullpen Bulletins. The cover to #156, is one of this writer's personal favorites!

Strange's battle with Zom in #157 takes on overtones of desperation, as Strange risks the consequences of severing Zom's forelock, and the Cloak of Levitation is severely burned (and functionally useless) as a result. Zom's attempts to destroy Strange fail and the mystic monster is ultimately banished upon the arrival of the Tribunal. The Tribunal's judgment against the earth is explained in "The Sands of Death!" (*Strange Tales* #158, July 1967) as punishment for Strange's "crime" against the universal balance by the release of Zom and the severing of his forelock. As told through Roy Thomas' scripts, these actions unleashed malevolent mystic energies upon the planet that pose a dire threat to the cosmic equilibrium. The artwork by Marie Severin and Herb Trimpe produced a classic full-page masterpiece on page 6 illustrating the Earth's impending doom—a scene that would find its way onto the cover of Pink Floyd's second album, "A Saucerful of Secrets," released several months afterward.

The concept of a "Living Tribunal" as a cosmic entity created a necessary compliment to Eternity, the "striving purpose" adjunct to a "life force" of the universe. The Tribunal's stated role is that of protector of the "World's Without End," (#156, page 9), and makes an imposing impression as an omnipotent judge, with his three visages—Equity, Revenge and Necessity. The world was obviously safe from the Tribunal's wrath after #163, as he, like Veritas, never appeared again in Dr. Strange's life.

Strange is able to argue with the Tribunal for a reprieve, and further demonstrates that he is up to the task of stemming the tide of evil, by first restoring his Cloak of Levitation. The Tribunal agrees to a "time out" and challenges Strange to accomplish the feat before the "sands of death" in the (hour-) "Glass of Doom" run out. Strange's first important task though, is to rebuild the demolished Sanctum in "The Evil That Men Do!" (#159, August 1967). This time around, money (and the Vault) aren't even an issue, as Strange's incantation restores the building to its pre-Umar state. Ultimately, a growing state of spiritual malevolence leads to the return of none other than Baron Mordo, abetted by the concentrated energies of many mystic minions mentally ensnared by Mordo's powerful disciples and flunkies. Strange's task is to exorcise these energies, taking an incredible risk by transferring them to the villainous Mordo, who is declared by Strange to be a "fitting host for this occult savagery!, in "If This Planet You Would Save!" (#160, September 1967), the first of two Raymond Marais scripts on the series. Not surprisingly, Mordo quickly uses his new-found energies to attack Strange at the end of the mass exorcism. This chapter would also see the return of Victoria Bentley, a neophyte British mystic who first appeared in *Strange Tales* #114.

Mordo dispatches Strange on an amnesia-addled journey through the "dark region from whence none return!" in "And a Scourge Shall Come Upon You!" (#161, October 1967),



which saw Dan Adkins start as the new series artist. Both Strange and Victoria Bentley find themselves drawn, separately, to a strange planet populated apparently by giant ants and other oversized invertebrates, as well as green-toned, oddly-distorted looking mystic entity known as Nebulos—"Lord of the Planets Perilous!" ("For I am indeed the wonder of wonders!") who has plans for both of his "visitors." And soon enough, Strange is returned to Earth just in time to interrupt Mordo's gloating in "From the Never-World Comes... Nebulos!" (#162, November 1967).

With Jim Lawrence on board as the new writer, this episode in the Strange-Mordo conflict was clearly against the Baron due to the absorptive power of the odd staff that Nebulos had given Dr. Strange moments before. Mordo is again banished, this time to a place "Far beyond the cosmic pale" (page 5), AKA "the bleak void of everlasting nothingness" (page 6). While Strange fails to realize the full power of the staff, as Nebulos intimates (page 10), it is nevertheless sufficient for gathering all the evil energies from Earth prior to the Sands of Death running out, thus fulfilling his bargain with the Tribunal. Instead, Nebulos draws Strange (and the Glass of Doom) to his planet, soon to be followed by the appearance of Tribunal.

The closing showdown of this sequence occurs in "The Three Faces of Doom!" (#163, December 1967) where the Tribunal's judgment of doom is indeed lifted from the Earth, but in turn, sentenced onto Nebulos and his realm. Strange's interference in the ensuing conflict, in order to determine Victoria's whereabouts, serves only to anger the Tribunal, but ultimately he saves the day by capturing the staff from a doomed Nebulos. Upon presenting it to the Tribunal, Strange is granted a boon at the close as the Tribunal sends him to the place of Ms. Bentley's consignment.

Long-term *Strange Tales* readers may have thought that they were experiencing déjà vu with the artwork in these last three issues, as many panels, especially several in #162, appear to be "swipes" by Adkins of old Ditko art from the period spanned by issues #130-139 (with other issues thrown in as well). A clue to this apparent "copy-cat" syndrome is, however, provided in the Bullpen Bulletins page in *Strange Tales* #157,

Continued on page 64

***Strange Tales* #162 (Nov 1967) & *Strange Tales* #166 (Mar 1968) are Marvel issues that fall into what many collectors and dealers sometimes describe as "the late '60's Marvel glut." For years, Marvels from this period were available in bountiful numbers causing prices to remain low and back issue sales static. Even in the year 2000, these 30+ year-old books Guide for a mere $2.50 in GD and a more-than-reasonable $7.50 in FN**

IN PURSUIT OF CONFESSIONS OF A COLLECTOR

Ten years ago if someone would have suggested to me that at 42 years of age I would be obsessed with collecting comic books I would have laughed long and hard. Now however, I am very happy to admit that collecting has become a major part of my life.

It all began very innocently when my ten-year-old son Andrew came home from the corner variety store with a handful of packages of *Marvel Superhero* cards. He insisted that I join him at the kitchen table to examine his treasures. Spread out before us was a little piece of my own boyhood. Dozens of colorful cardboard images of a character that I hadn't seen or thought of for close to 24 years. Peter Parker or as he is better known… the Amazing Spider-Man. As I examined the cards with my son he was amazed that I knew the names and powers of nearly all the characters. He'd never know that at his age I had lived in the Marvel Universe. Through my early teens I was your typical comic book nerd, living for the newest releases of the greatest stories ever written. The sight of those cards set me to remembering those days and the vast collection that I once had, (notice the emphasis on once).

Those 1991 Marvel cards hooked me, took me back to when I was thirteen and there was nothing more important on Earth than the feel of a brand new Marvel comic book. There was no turning back, the addiction of collecting slowly began to grip me.

The cover of *Amazing Spider-Man* #33 is very vivid in my mind. It was the first *ASM* that I ever bought. It was one of Ditko's classics, Spidey trapped under tons of machinery while the water poured in, threatening to drown him. That book started me on my first era of collecting which lasted from the age of 12 to 15. It was the Golden Age of Marvel, the period when the House of Ideas was in full flower. The classic copies featuring Spidey, Fantastic Four, Daredevil, Thor and others were created in that 1960's renaissance of comics. They were my most treasured possessions and I collected with a fervor without really realizing that I was a collector. All I knew was that I loved those books and lived for the weekly trip to the store, my 75¢ clutched tightly in hand. This princely sum would buy me six comics, the kind store owner never charged me tax. Of them all *Spidey* was undoubtedly my favorite and I scoured the secondhand book stores, searching for all the back copies issued before I bought #33. Even then they were difficult to find, and it took me two years to acquire them all. Yes, even *Spidey* #1 and *Amazing Fantasy* #15, both bought for 50¢.

Although I remember starting that collection, I can't recall when I stopped buying comics. It must have been when I was 15, during the second year of high school. The Marvel obsession just slipped away and disappeared as I discovered girls and began to concentrate on school. Reflecting back to those years I now know that Spidey would have treated me far kinder than the teenage girls of my youth.

One truly black moment in my life was that day in 1972 when I sold my entire collection of *Spidey* to a used book dealer. He bought #1-80 for $80. At that time I thought I had the better of the deal and I'll never know for sure if he realized just what he was buying or how much they were worth even then. As I walked away from that store I couldn't help but think that somehow I had made a terrible mistake. The rest of my collection was given to the Salvation Army by my mother when I was in university and I didn't even notice they were gone.

Now I realize that I have become the cliché. I am now the typical figure in the comic store, the poor ill informed fool that had somehow sold or discarded his collection and was now spending big dollars to re-acquire them… pouring through boxes at conventions searching for those treasures from the past. I often wonder where the hobby would be without us stereotype collectors. The group over 40 and still in pursuit of those adventure filled books we owned in our youth.

The decision to begin collecting again started with my son's cards. Soon I found myself buying the Macfarlane-era Spider-Man cards and then I decided to buy some of the black costume *ASMs*. That was when I discovered the value of the collection that had been… the one I sold and had given away. I'm certain the poor salesclerk thought I was about to have a cardiac when he showed me the prices of those early *Spider-Mans*. In Canadian dollars they would have come close to $30,000 in value, (after all they weren't all Near Mints as I didn't care for them with the same

PETER PARKER

BY JOHN R. STUART

reverence as I do now). More than enough to pay off the mortgage, not that I would have the heart to sell them.

For anyone that is about to begin to acquire a collection, believe me when I say it is a daunting task. The amount of money and time required are both enormous, it is not a task which should be undertaken lightly. But compared with a Golden Age collection of say *Action* or *Detective* comics my goal is far more attainable. A case in point is Michelle Nolan's four decade quest (chronicled in *CBM* #43) to find the DC "BIG Fight." I applaud Michelle's tenacity and am eternally thankful that my *Amazing Spider-Man*'s are much easier to find.

Based upon my admiration for the Macfarlane cards depicting the black Spider-Man costume, I began my collection with *ASM* #252, with the intention that I would buy only the black costume copies. But the hook was set deeper than I had thought and once these books were bought I gradually came to the conclusion that only a complete collection would satisfy me. Thus set out in pursuit of Peter Parker.

Faced with the task of financing a complete collection, I decided to begin purchasing from newest release to earliest, that way if the urge to collect began to wane then my cash outlay would be minimal.

Now, years later I have a complete run from #100 to most current, plus most of the issues from #51 to #99, with a total of sixty comics left to buy. Of course I need all the issues from #1 to #40, all the expensive and most collectible. To date I have been able to buy strictly very fines and near mints, but this philosophy of buying the very best available is now financially restrictive. I must decide whether to lower my standards… should I pay those exorbitant high grade prices… or buy the less expensive lower grades? This is a personal argument that I have yet to resolve, but my gut feeling is that any collection should be comprised of only the very best. (After all, doesn't Peter Parker deserve it?)

When I first started collecting it was without benefit of any guidance from any experienced collectors. The past four years have certainly been an educational experience. Watching other collectors bargain and haggle with vendors taught me that this is a business where negotiation is of prime importance. Where there are several vendors at work at the same convention, selling similar runs of books, there is far more room for negotiation. There tends to be a willingness to lower the price, and I love the process of dickering over a really good book. Even shaving a dollar or two off the price is part of the joy of the hobby. However I have seen collectors and vendors get into some heated conversations that were far to belligerent for my tastes. Negotiation is one thing, but screaming like Arab horse traders is a touch too extreme for me.

I've seen collectors act like wild animals when they arrive simultaneously at a box containing a run of books that both are desperate for. Is there any greater joy than coming across that copy of a desired book and finding that it is grossly underpriced? Or the thrill of discovering a stack of vintage books at a garage sale at a quarter a copy! Part of the joy of collecting as most collectors will agree is the thrill of the hunt. It comes from the anticipation of never knowing what treasure awaits around the corner, hidden away in that used book store or at the church rummage sale. Collecting has been a growing experience for me personally. I've enjoyed the search for my vintage *Spideys* and have subsequently moved on to other interesting books, mostly from the Bronze Age. Those great DC, Marvel, and Warren horror books in particular.

During the years my son and I have grown closer during our combined convention outings. I have returned from a successful convention outing only to discover that my brother had passed away. The books from that day stayed untouched in my briefcase for three or four months before I could bear to look at them.

I don't care much for the speculative, investment mentality that seems to be so prevalent in the hobby these days. Personally speaking, I buy the comics for the art, the stories, and for the feeling of being thirteen all over again. If the price of the comics were to plummet down to a dollar a copy I would be ecstatic because I could then buy those early copies. But supply and demand is still what drives the hobby and is unlikely to change.

I doubt that I will ever actually finish my collection, after all there aren't many average fathers of two that can afford the lofty prices of a *Spidey* #1 even in Very Good to Fair condition. But I'll continue… and perhaps on a Saturday trip to a local garage sale I will discover there in amongst the Archie's the Holy Grail of comics, a *Spidey* #1. As Bogart said in the Maltese Falcon, "That's the stuff that dreams are made of."

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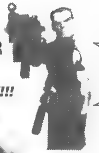

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Spider-Man's Great Grandfather!

BY JOSEPH LOVECE

Spider-Man may be the most famous masked crime fighter in all the Marvel Universe but he is by no means the first. The initial masked superhero for the comics group was, of course, Joe Simon's Fiery Mask in publisher Martin Goodman's *Daring Comics* #1. Before him the first Goodman disguised comic book hero was The Masked Raider featured in *Marvel Comics* #1's only western tale. He didn't have super powers, but he did hide his face.

The lineage, however, goes back even farther for The Masked Raider himself was only a pale imitation of the very first Goodman masked hero (and continuing character), the great-grandfather of all the Silver Age Marvel Comics characters: The Masked Rider (unrelated to a certain popular bug-like TV hero).

The year is 1934. A 26-year old Martin Goodman is managing editor and front man for a group of New York pulp magazine companies owned by Louis Silberkleit, the "L" of MLJ (Archie Comics). Among the pulps in this stable are *Complete Western Book Magazine, Black Book Detective, Gang World, Western Novel And Short Stories*, and *The Masked Rider*.

Some of the best-selling Depression-era pulps featured continuing masked detectives, like The Shadow (in this case a red scarf serving the purpose), The Phantom Detective and The Spider. And at the time western books and magazines were also a lucrative market. The publishing industry's Martin and Louis put their heads together and combined the two subjects. The pulp company was notoriously tight with dollars, so the men must have decided that creating an original hero was prohibitively expensive. A substitute was sought and found in Oscar Schisgall's novel *The Masked Rider* (Penn Publishing Co., Philadelphia, 1928), a book today so scarce even the Library of Congress does not have a copy, nor did Schisgall's estate. He was a top mystery writer of his time, keeping company with the likes of Earle Stanley Gardner.

The publisher bought the magazine rights not only to the story but also to the character as well... so the adventures could continue. Goodman and editor Lincoln Hoffman (who would soon take over *Black Book Detective*) abridged and retitled the novel (without noting in the magazine that it was a reprint) to "The Black Caballero" and put it in front of the April 1934 issue of *The Masked Rider* issued by Silberkleit's Ranger Publications Inc. Although illegal, presenting the story as new must have fooled the readers—even

many pulp magazine historians today do not realize it was a reprint.

The tale presented an hombre called "The Robin Hood of the West." Actually, he was more like a cross between Zorro and The Shadow, with The Lone Ranger tossed in for good measure. Was the company name "Ranger" specifically formed to publish this magazine, a tribute to The Lone Ranger? That masked hero had made his appearance on radio slightly before (but did not get a pulp magazine until 1937).

The description of The Masked Rider was the typical pulp magazine fare: "His clothes presented a perfect symphony in black. From sombrero to boots, including the mask, his apparel was absolutely uncompromising in its blackness. His stallion itself shared the color—a mount as glossily black as a Nedjee colt. And to complete the bizarre effect, he wore a long Mexican cloak which flowed over him in voluminous black folds. It concealed the lines of his figures; and when he rode fast, it usually billowed out behind him fantastically, like the wings of a monstrous bat." Behind the mask he was cowpoke Wayne Morgan. His faithful Native American companion was the Spanish-speaking Blue Hawk.

If the description sounds familiar, it should. As we shall see below, he turned up later as The Black Rider, sans companion.

The hero appeared in the first issue full-blown, without benefit of an origin. But in Schisgall's fictional Western universe he was already famous as an outlaw who helped the common folk.

The second issue (May 1934) featured The Masked Rider story "The Avenging Shadow" by William H. Steuber. The character suffered from multiple author syndrome—there was no house name penning all the stories like The Shadow's Maxwell Grant or Doc Savage's Kenneth Robeson. The 1934 issue of the trade journal *Writer's Digest* noted that stories for The Masked Rider were "done to order." Future writers of the character included Orrin Holmer, George A. Starbird and Jay J. Kalez.

Alas, the character was in Goodman's hands only a short time. In the summer of 1934 Silberkleit bowed out of the picture (a subject for a different article), Goodman took control of *Complete Western Book* and *Western Novels and Short Stories* and Hoffman inherited *The Masked Rider, Black Book Detective* and *Gang World*. In 1937 Hoffman sold the rights to the first two titles to Ned Pines, owner of the so-called "Thrilling" group of pulp magazines and the Better-Standard group of comics. Under Pines and editor Leo Margulies the character lost his black hood and only sported a domino mask à la The Lone Ranger. *Black Book Detective* became the home of The Black Bat, a contemporary of Batman.

Fast forward to late 1939. When Goodman created Marvel Comics he looked to his pulps for inspiration. He directed Ben Thompson to produce a strip called "Ka-Zar" which closely adapted an original novel that appeared in Goodman's pulp *Ka-Zar* in 1936. And for a western strip the publisher turned to The Masked Rider. But since Martin did not own the rights he changed the costume to a full face mask only and added an "a" to the name: The Masked Raider. The mask hid ranch owner Jim Gardley, and in this case the story carried his origin. The Masked Raider lasted only until *Marvel Mystery Comics* #12, and was replaced in the next issue by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby's original character… The Vision.

In the winter of 1948 the Marvel publisher again looked to The Masked Rider and the character The Black Rider was born in the comic *All Western Winners* #2. The name was different and he had no Native American to help him, but the black costume was back in all its glory.

And speaking of Spider-Man, Jack Kirby, whom Stan Lee in 1962 originally tapped to draw that character, drew the Black Rider for the September 1957 comic *The Black Rider Rides Again*!

One more thing—since Silberkleit was the boss, The Masked Rider as his first continuing character is also Archie's great-grandfather… making the red-headed wonder and Spider-Man second cousins

STRANGE AS IT SEEMS! *(Continued from page 59)*

which announced the addition of Adkins to the Marvel staff. The blurb noted that "If his style reminds you of another former Marvel-man [not identified], it's because Dan has worked with him, sometimes anonymously, for quite a while…" Is it possible that Adkins created some of the very same original artwork that was later used in *Strange Tales* #161 through 163?.

Strange Tales #163-168

Serving almost as an epilogue, the rescue of Victoria Bentley becomes a brief exploration into the concept of pitting super-science and technology against occult forces in the form of Yandroth, "Scientist Supreme," in "Nightmare" (#164, January 1968). The setting and mood take on that of a science-fantasy adventure, with Strange confronting large alien creatures in #164, and super-technology in #165 ("The Mystic and The Machine!"), in the form of lasers, Q-Ray blasters and a destructive robot known as Voltorgg! Hailing from an unknown Yandroth has taken Victoria Bentley into captivity, intending to marry her and make her his "Queen" of all the universes he plans to conquer through the "cold, relentless power of science" channeled through his "irresistible mentality."

With the "rehabilitation" of Victoria Bentley, there was created a potential relationship triangle (vis-a-vis Clea), although within this particular sequence, Victoria seems to be treated as a helpless object (although she did attack Yandroth at the end of #167). With Clea consigned to oblivion, it seems that the friendly women in Dr. Strange's life were finding themselves in great danger and in need of his rescue.

Yandroth soon sees that one-on-one combat with Strange is too risky, and he distracts Strange with Voltorgg (#166, March 1968) while he whisks away with Victoria, via teleportation, to another haven. Strange attempts to follow, only to arrive at Stonehenge, in time to witness the return to life of the Ancient One. Victoria and Yandroth are located in the Dread Dimension of Dreams through use of the Vapors of Valtorr ("This Dream...This Doom!", #167, April 1968). The shift in setting may have reflected the changeover in writing chores to Denny O'Neil (again). Strange can only access this dimension by dissolving into the Ancient One's "Transhypnotic Jewel." Arriving in this place of illogic, Strange gradually upends Yandroth, causing his foe to drift for eternity in the unreality of the Dream Dimension ("Exile," #168, May 1968), and rescues Ms. Bentley from a small band of Vikings as well. Strange's connection to the real world is being maintained by the increasingly fatigued Ancient One, and thus both rescue and return are made in the proverbial nick of time. (This last 5-issue sequence was reprinted in late 1975 in *Giant-Size Dr. Strange*, albeit with about three pages from *Strange Tales* #166 edited out.) While the title changed after issue #168, the loose ends remained and, following a revised origin and a brief encounter with Nightmare, the Dr. Strange-Victoria Bentley-Clea triangle would be touched on again, starting in *Dr. Strange* #171, but that's another story, for another time.

The Marvel Method

Forgotten Struggles in the Formative Years

BY NICHOLAS CAPUTO

Popular opinion notwithstanding, the success of Marvel Comics superhero line did not happen overnight. In its infancy, the only series referred to that did not meet with instant popularity was the *Incredible Hulk*, canceled after six issues. While the strip suffered from a lack of focus, it did not remain missing for long. Nevertheless, it was not the only time that Marvel Comics, under the editorial tutelage of Stan Lee, lost its way. Burrowing under the ruins of a half-hidden, dust covered, 40-year-old tomb, I hope to illuminate some of the problems that plagued the early days of Marvel comics, presenting a number of hypotheses that may lead to further research into a fascinating period in the history of comics.

Stan Lee, as editor and head writer (as well as art director), was burdened with a small staff and many new ideas in 1962/63. Focusing on the Fantastic Four with Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko on Spider-Man, he was able to shape these two very different and innovative series through a process of trial and error. There were obvious attempts to break the stereotypical mold of what superhero comics were supposed to be, such as the heroes getting along with each other and having no personal problems. While trying to follow the pattern of these strips, as well as continue the other titles that comprised the fledgling Marvel Comics Group, there had to be compromises, both in story and art.

Jack Kirby was unable to draw every title (though he was extremely prolific and penciled practically every cover); Stan Lee could not script every story. When superheroes became the dominant trend, Lee called on his brother, Larry Lieber, to write many of the strips. He had been scripting the monster titles anyway (*Tales of Suspense, Tales to Astonish, Strange Tales*, and *Journey into Mystery*, which the new superheroes took residence in; mainly due to a distribution deal that allotted the company a finite number of books on the stands) and Lee was occupied with books that starred characters (i.e. Rawhide Kid, Two Gun Kid, Kid Colt Outlaw, Millie the Model, and Patsy Walker), as well as the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man.

It is uncertain why Lee continued to script these books for so long, but he quite simply may have enjoyed writing continuing characters and had a rapport with Atlas/Marvel veterans such as Jack Keller and Stan Goldberg, which made his job simpler. Stan Goldberg, for one, has stated that he worked "Marvel method" (penciling a story from a plot, which was dialogued by Lee afterward) much earlier than previously believed, as has Steve Ditko, so the process may have been used as a shortcut with certain artists that began before the superheroes arrived on the scene in 1961.

When Thor, Ant-Man, Iron-Man and the Human Torch debuted (in *Journey into Mystery, Tales to Astonish, Tales of Suspense*, and *Strange Tales*, respectively) Lee initially turned all those characters over to Larry Lieber. Lieber himself has confirmed that Lee plotted the stories, giving him a starting-off point. It is sensible to assume that Lee, in an editorial capacity, supervised over all

the stories, and may have worked out some ideas with both Lieber and Kirby (the heroes with afflictions was most probably a Lee inspiration, one he employed later with the blind Matt Murdock and the wheelchair-bound Professor Xavier) he may have told Lieber or Kirby "Let's make the hero lame" (Don Blake) or "let's give the hero a weak heart that can give out at any time" (Tony Stark) a significant contribution that would add drama to the strips.

The stories by Lieber and others were almost certainly produced full-script and not the "Marvel method" that Lee popularized with Ditko, Kirby, Ayers and others. How much input Kirby had into the stories in this early period is questionable, but they did not have the innovative qualities that he and Lee provided with the Fantastic Four.

Many of the early tales of Thor, Iron-Man, the Torch, and Ant-Man, while possessing a certain crude charm of their own, do not read like the Fantastic Four or Spider-Man, which relied on characterization, colorful villains and a Lee trademark... humor. The non-Lee tales are fairly sober events, consisting of the heroes facing an assortment of crackpots, crooks, low-grade villains and, inevitably, Communists, who were considered a very real threat in the midst of the Cold War.

The exceptions to this rule are worthy of attention: Loki became Thor's primary nemesis in his third appearance (*Journey into Mystery* #85; October 1962). He was utilized frequently in the title's first year and a half, even when Lieber and later Robert Bernstein (a writer who had worked for EC Comics in their "New Trend" period and wrote for DC comics on titles like *Superman*) under the aegis of R. Berns, scripted the stories. Odin and other Asgardians were also introduced, so it is not impossible to conceive that Kirby or Lee had direct input into these issues.

The Iron-Man series introduced supporting characters Happy Hogan and Pepper Potts (*Tales of Suspense* # 45; September 1963). Stan Lee had a habit of using alliterative names such as Bruce Banner, Peter Parker, Matt Murdock, etc., building a strong case for his involvement in the creation of these characters (the opposite is true in the christening of Don Blake, Tony Stark, and Hank Pym, who Lieber believes were his ideas). Ant-Man was granted an outgoing female partner and love-interest in the Wasp (*Tales to Astonish* #44, June 1963), providing a counterpoint to his more sedate personality. The Human Torch met up with the Wizard, a criminal mastermind who would later develop into a leading adversary of the Fantastic Four as the leader of their amoral counterparts, the Frightful Four.

Books cover-dated October/November 1963 are significant, for they initiate the many changes that take place in the superhero titles, as Stan Lee decided to take a more active hand in the direction of the books. (It should also be noted that Martin Goodman, as publisher, may have had a hand in requesting changes on certain books, especially in their look.) *Tales Of Suspense* #47 sported a cover blurb proclaiming: "Special Super Issue! Lee, Ditko, and Heck team up to bring you... IRON MAN, greater, more true-to-life than ever, as he battles 'The Mysterious MELTER!'." Creators were rarely referred to on the covers, but Lee was instrumental in turning both himself and his artists into "celebrities."

After eight issues and a number of cosmetic changes (his armor had changed from gray to yellow after his first appearance) Iron-Man seemed to be stagnating. Whether this was both aesthetically and sales-wise is uncertain, but Stan Lee could not have been pleased with the direction that the book was going in. Under the auspices of writers Larry Lieber and Robert Bernstein... and artists Jack Kirby and Don Heck... it was a well drawn series that failed to radiate with the magic that Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four embodied. While Tony Stark's weak heart was introduced, it was not emphasized to any great degree, and the bulky, robot-like costume that Kirby created, while appealing on a certain level, may have failed to attract a large audience.

Whatever the real reason, Lee resolved to take over the Iron Man strip and turn it into a more suitable property. Don Heck, most closely associated with the series, having penciled the initial story and all but three of the following issues, was replaced by Steve Ditko, with Heck continuing as inker to retain the strip's look. Ditko may have been brought in for a very simple reason.

Heck, who had probably worked from a full script with Lieber and Bernstein, needed time to acquaint himself with the new "Marvel method" of plot-pencils-script (Ayers seems to recall that he worked full script with those writers in this period). Heck may have been broken in when Lee assigned him to Thor, which he drew for three issues (*Journey into Mystery* #98-100, November 1963-January 1964) concurrent with his departure from Iron-Man. Lee, working with Ditko on Spider-Man, and, earlier on *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, was conscious of his storytelling talents, and probably requested Ditko to help renovate the strip while Heck was picking up storytelling pointers from Kirby.

After penciling three issues of Iron-Man Ditko bowed out, but not before he performed a crucial operation on the strip. Ditko was required to redesign Iron-Man's costume, and he accomplished this task impressively, creating a sleek red and yellow outfit, topped off with a distinctive metal face mask. This visual overhaul may have contributed to the strip's ongoing success: the basic costume design remains to this day, which is hardly coincidental.

Don Heck returned to the art when Kirby moved back to Thor (Ditko, it has been rumored, had no interest in continuing the strip, although its quite possible he may only have been called in to pinch-hit for Heck). While Heck has admitted in interviews to disliking the new "Marvel method," he was enough of a pro to adapt to the system and enjoy some of the aspects of his new artistic freedom. With the exception of two issues Stan Lee would continue to dialogue the Iron-Man strip for many years in its lead-off spot in *Tales of Suspense*. (The two issues were *Tales of Suspense* #52 & 53, April and May 1964, both scripted by Don Rico, under the pseudonym of N. Kurzok. Rico was both a writer and artist for Timely/Atlas on features such as Captain America.)

Ant-Man, struggling to find an audience in *Tales To Astonish*, was also due for a revamp. The diminutive hero began facing criminals like Egghead and the occasional throwback to the book's monster features with the Scarlet Beetle (a giant mutated Beetle, and I make note of him because Kirby was able to imbue this silly character with personality. Another reason he was a breed apart), but Kirby's use of perspective and engaging artwork held the strip together for five issues. He was replaced by Don Heck, who did a credible but unexceptional job on the art.

Ernie Hart, working as H. E. Huntley, scripted five issues, including the introduction of the Wasp (which Kirby was called on to pencil). Hart had worked for Marvel when it was Timely Comics in the 1940s, as editor on their Funny Animal line. He also wrote for a variety of genres, including

horror, fantasy and westerns. Hart produced some interesting stories, notably the initial Wasp tale, which included a flashback explaining how Hank Pym lost his wife, but the strip (burdened by a number of uninspired covers) was on unstable ground.

After 14 issues, Lee, with Kirby by his side, chose to go in another direction with the book, and Giant-Man was created. Since a small hero didn't seem to work, Kirby or Lee assumed that the opposite would fare better. Kirby remained for three issues, including an early two-part story, handing the baton over to Dick Ayers. Giant-Man lasted for 21 issues in this incarnation, but Lee failed to make the strip unique. Sales may not have been a reason, but Lee replaced Giant-Man in *Tales to Astonish* with a popular supporting character, the Sub-Mariner. To his credit, Lee didn't quit on the character, who would be revived with various costume and name changes for a long run in the pages of *The Avengers*.

The Mighty Thor had shaky beginnings as well. While Kirby penciled many of the early issues, Al Hartley, an artist associated with romance and humor strips like Patsy Walker, was a poor substitute for Kirby, mercifully penciling only one issue. Joe Sinnott replaced him for five issues, but again the stories (written by Lieber and Bernstein) did not have the necessary imaginative punch. Lee teamed with Kirby for the first time in *Journey into Mystery* #97 (once again credited on the cover) for one issue, followed by a trio of acceptable Don Heck stories.

With Heck returning to Iron-Man, Kirby was called back to full-time service on Thor, and the strip eventually rose in the ranks to become one of Marvel's best-selling titles. While it is questionable to speculate on Thor's sales, especially since no definitive changes were required, Lee was aware of the strips unused potential and with Kirby's instinctive mixing of fantasy and mythology, was able to take the strip in exciting new directions.

The Human Torch, while only a spin-off from the Fantastic Four, was another strip that did not fulfill its promise. It was handled by an array of writers, including Larry Lieber, Robert Bernstein, Ernie Hart, and even Jerry Siegel (under the pseudonym Joe Carter). Kirby was followed by Dick Ayers, who did an admirable job (having had previous experience drawing the original Human Torch in the mid-1950s). Beginning in *Strange Tales* #114, Lee replaced his writers, took the reins himself, and in the process had Kirby join him to test the waters for a Captain America revival.

Ayers returned in the following issue, and Lee would stay on, attempting different formulas for the strip (the Thing would become the official co-star with issue #124, with the series resembling a situation-comedy more than an adventure strip) until he decided to drop the series and debut another spin-off: Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.

It's doubtful that the Torch series was dropped due to poor sales. It's possible that Lee just couldn't get the series to work to his satisfaction and wanted to try something new (it was also around this time that Lee felt it strained credibility to have too many of his characters in different books at the same time. Two months earlier he changed the Avengers line-up and introduced characters that didn't have their own books for that very reason).

Stan Lee, as editorial director of the Marvel line, had many hats to wear With only Sol Brodsky as production manager, he was burdened by the job of churning out a plethora of western, girl titles, and superheroes. He had to call on other writers, who were not capable of embellishing the product with the touches of humor and human interest that he was able to achieve with Kirby and Ditko at the helm. Eventually Lee would realize that the "Marvel method" needed to be utilized for the sake of expediency, enabling him to craft the stories to his satisfaction, and in the process creating a persona for the company that he could manufacture, embellish and refine. It also gave the artists tremendous input into the pacing, direction and creation of the story, which inventive minds like Ditko and Kirby took utmost advantage of.

By the mid-1960s everyone that joined the company, including earlier Atlas/Marvel residents such as Gene Colan, Bill Everett, John Romita, and John Buscema, had to pick up on the new operation (many of them under the tutelage of Jack Kirby, as plotter and layout artist, who in effect gave them visual lessons that Lee expected them to embrace). Lee needed to continue the dynamics of Kirby without actually using Kirby. It was a wise move, as Lee was aware that Kirby's presence was a prime-mover in the sales of the superhero books.

Heck and Ayers adapted as best they could, but they were suited to other types of stories; notably war, western, and fantasy tales, but, with the exception of the best-selling Sgt. Fury (ostensibly a superhero strip) those types of books were becoming passé.

What would have happened if Stan Lee did not take over the characters featured in *Tales of Suspense*, *Tales to Astonish*, *Strange Tales*, and *Journey into Mystery*? Were these titles ever truly close to cancellation? Sales figures for this early period were not published, so we can only speculate on the true status of these books, but like the Hulk, who lived on almost immediately after his book was canceled, Lee would probably not have given up on them so easily. Indeed, *The Avengers*, which began in 1963, became the second home for Thor, Iron-Man, Ant-Man, the Wasp and (initially) the Hulk. Lee clearly felt these characters had potential, even if they were being mishandled in their own titles.

He slowly became aware that the books needed a strong editorial focus which other writers failed to deliver, and when he took over the direction of the individual books they gained that identity, in effect turning Marvel Comics into a true "Group" of titles. It was to Lee's credit that Ditko and, especially, Kirby were used as leadoff hitters, serving as examples for the lower end of the batting order to follow. Lee would have to wait until 1965 to ease his workload and concentrate on the company's editorial direction, when Roy Thomas arrived as writer/editorial assistant. Thomas was able to emulate Lee enough to create a seamless thread in the stories, and his interest in comics history and continuity, as well as literary skills, helped Lee immensely.

Other writers would follow, but always under the watchful editorial eye of Lee, who was aware of past indiscretions and did not want them repeated. In molding his artists to emulate Kirby's dynamics, and his writers to follow his breezy, irreverent style, he created an image that relied on a single vision. It became the basis for Marvel's success, and their rise to the top of the comics industry

Thanks to Mark Evanier for inspiration from his great articles in CBG.

THE MICHAEL NAIMAN REPORT

New Investors not Collectors

Hadn't seen San Diego that packed in many years. Money was flowing and dealers had smiles on their faces. When was the last time you saw that? There were dealers there that I haven't seen at a San Diego show in years! Some set up, others just cruising the room. The market is hot, so I guess they decided it was time to cash in! Artwork was flying. One Pittsburgh based collector seemed to be living a charmed life in regards to picking up the choice DC Silver Age material he collects. Two days in a row he was in the right place at the right time when a passing collector went to sell his portfolio to a dealer. Standing courteously to the side as Mr. Dealer was examining the Marvel and DC stuff, The "Good Doctor of the Silver Age" was able to pick up all of the DC material the dealer didn't want. JLA, Mystery in Space, and more. Whew!

Some sales of note: 40 Big Pages of Mickey Mouse FN $600; Action #23 FN $1,000; Adventure #247 FN $800; All Star #36 FN+ $800; #8 FN- $6,000; Amazing Adventures #2 VG $55, #3 VG $60; Amazing Spider-Man #1 GD $900; Animal Antics #37 VG $17; Avengers #1 NM (Northland copy) $4,800; Batman #1 GD $7,000; Captain America #1 FN+ $18,000; Detective Eye #2 NM- (Mile High) $4,500; Funny Folks #49 GD $7; GI in Battle #1 NM $500; Jann of the Jungle #14 VF/NM $125; John Wayne #8 FN+ $285; Katy Keene Pin-Up Parade #4 FN/VF $140; Pep #88 VF/NM $100; Poll Parrot #12 FN $5; Real Screen #1 VF $275; Strange Terrors #7 NM $750; Superman #22 FN $450, #26 VG/FN $250; Weird Fantasy #16 VF+ $165; World's Finest #5 FN $1,000.

Rumor has it that next year's show might be able to expand into the newly enlarged Convention Center. The show would be 50% larger than it is now. Time to get a trolley service inside the building! My pups are barking already!! Kudos to Beth Holley, VP of Exhibits, for another job well done. She might be small in stature, but she's mighty in wielding her powers of persuasion when it comes to dealing with the thousands of problems that she solves during the course of a single show! Nathalia Quirk and her gang at registration had the best year ever. When was the last time you saw no lines in front of Dealers Registration at 1:30 PM in the afternoon? Check 'em in, give them their badges, and off they went!

There was a good mix of dealers with slabbed and unslabbed books. You could take your pick. Dollar books for the completist were difficult to keep in stock. There was a slabbed Amazing Fantasy #15 with a price tag of $100K… but no takers at that price. However, I came to understand that a couple of offers of 75K were turned down.

With the introduction of CGC to the marketplace, we are now beginning to experience some of the fallout effects. Probably the most significant (and one of their stated prime directives) is the introduction of many new people to the hobby.

My experience at the show, however, was that the new people I saw buying slabbed books were not "collectors" per se. They were, instead, investors only… and I'll bet nowhere in their speculative souls will you find the emotional or spiritual attachment to the characters, stories, and creators that we as collectors have cherished.

These new investors said unabashedly that they are in it solely for the money. I worry, however, about what will happen when they want to sell. Perhaps they'll sell to other investors, and the prices realized will continue to escalate. Are these books "worth it?" Maybe not to us, the collector. Are they "worth it" to investors? Probably, yes. A related concern I have centers on the fact that the prices these new investors are paying seem to have nothing to do with the current Guide *(Continued on page 72)*

JAMIE NEWBOLD & GINO SIRACUSA
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Hello from comic war-torn San Diego! We're recovering from our battles in the trenches of the San Diego ComiCon International. We managed to survive another ferocious conflict pitting veteran multi-national comic book dealers against a savage horde of eager collectors and shoppers in the mother of all comic book conventions!

Attendance records were not available to us at this time, but the sheer swell of numbers at the show indicated that more people were at the show than I'd ever seen in the past. The aisles were widened this year to prevent the blockades that occurred in the past although by Saturday the widened aisles didn't seem to matter. The enormous crowds made it nearly impossible to walk from one end of the room to the other.

As I write this, I'm aware that many CBM readers, both dealers and collectors, were in attendance at the show. They witnessed the sheer success of the Con in popularity as well as on a financial level. I spoke with other dealers and found that they concurred with the two observations Gino and I made about the convention:

1) Comic book back-issue sales were strong, maybe stronger than in previous years.

2) The Internet may be responsible for the influx of new hands-on shoppers to the con.

Popular theory has it that the various Internet sites (and the Internet form of communication) actually brought people out of their homes to explore their favorite collecting pastimes… and to experience firsthand what they had become

◆◆ CBM MarketWatch ◆◆

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Guide) by Michael Naiman

Action
#12 VG- . . $656 . 95%
#23 GD. . $500 . 86%

Adventures Of Bob Hope
#15 VF . $115 Guide

All-American Western
#104 NM- (MH)$1092 4 2X

Amazing Spider-Man
#2 GD .$124 . 58%
#2 GD $124 58%
#6 NM $1250 Guide
#8 NM $800 Guide
#14 VG $192 46%
#20 VG $47 67%
#99 FN+ $51 1 06X
#33 NM $163 1 01X
#98 VF $25 45%
#100 NM- $125 71%
#101 VF $66 81%

Avengers
#4 GD $100 80%
#15 VF $30 40%

Batman
#143 VF $62 62%
#155 VG $45 82%
#181 VG $31 1 10X
#200 FN $30 83%
#234 FN+ $30 Guide

Big Town
#9 NM (MH) $590 4X
#13 NM MH).. $360 4X

Blonde Phantom
#13 GD+ $90 1 07X

Blue Bolt
#109 VG- . $59 74%

Brave & Bold
#18 GD+ $21 69%
#30 GD . $77 60%
#34 VG+ $296 85%
#35 VG $30 38%

Captain America
#117 VF. $90 69%

Captain Science
#7 VG. . ... $80 ..Guide

Comic Cavalcade
#10 VG.....$131 . . 62%
#14 VG+.....$135 78%

Comics On Parade
#10 VG+. .. $70 .74%

Creeper, Beware The
#1 FN+ .. . .. .$15 . 77%

Crime Does Not Pay
#90 GD . $15 1 30X
#95 GD . $8 70%

Crime Suspenstories
#7 VG+ . $15 27%

Daredevil
#5 FN+ . $41 . 72%
#15 VF . $25 64%

Detective
#266 VG.. . . $35 .80%

Doctor Solar
#1 VG .$19 59%

Doctor Strange
#169 VF $46 .64%
#169 VF $43 60%
#169 VF- . .$35 49%
#170 VF ...$11 .54%
#171 VF . . $11 .54%
#179 VF . $9 43%
#177 NM . $30 1 08X

Exciting
#12 GD $68 84%

Famous Funnies
#41 VG .. .. $138 .2.46X

Fantastic Four
#36 FN- $18 63%
#38 VF- .... $27 . .44%
#81 VF. .. .. $27 ..1.38X
#83 VF $27 . 1.38X
#116 VF+ . $21 1 75X

FF Annual
#1 VF- $152 37%

Gangbusters
#4 FN $50 58%

Giant Size X-Men
#1 VG+ .. $110 1 34X

Haunt Of Fear
#7 GD- $20 57%

I Love Lucy
#3 NM $140 74%
#22 NM $66 78%
#32 NM $50 59%

Iron Fist
#14 NM $95 Guide

Iron Man
#1 NM (CGC 9 8)$1931 .5 5X
#1 NM (CGC 9 6)$1000 2 86X
#1 NM (CGC 9 2)$485 1 39X
#1 NM . $305 87%
#1 VF . $177 80%
#1 VF $108 58%
#1 FN+ $119 1 27X
#1 FN $86 92%
#1 VG $53 85%
#1 VG $65 Guide
#2 FN $32 97%
#2 VG $18 80%
#2 VG $10 45%
#4 NM (CGC 9 4)$153 3 05X
#4 FN . .$15 .. Guide

Journey Into Mystery
#83 GD $907 69%

Lois Lane
#1 GD $300 94%
#70 VG $32 79%
#113 VF $71 3 08X
#136 NM $36 3X

Lone Ranger
#27 FN $46 1 70X
#116 NM. . $55 58%

Marvel Spotlight
#5 VF $26 54%

Millie Queen Size
#7 VF. .. .. $30 . 83%

Night Nurse
#1 VF $37 62%
#2 VF+ $26 63%

Our Army At War
#158 VF $30 77%

Scribbly
#11 VF+ .. .. $124 . .75%
#14 VF+ .$76 . .46%

Shock Suspenstories
#2 GD .. $33 . .87%
#4 GD . . $20 74%

Showcase
#22 VG . . .$595 . Guide
#34 VG . $145 . 76%
#45 VG $30 60%
#60 FN+ $60 80%

Silver Surfer
#1 VG $45 58%
#1 FN+ $110 94%
#4 FN $87 61%
#4 FN+ . . .$100 . .93%
#7 VF . . $30 .55%
#13 NM $35 70%

Space Detective
#1 VG $175 88%

Stories By Famous Authors
#6 VG+ .$51 . . 85%
#7 VG+ .$51 . 1 2X
#8 VG– $51 94%
#9 VG+ . $51 1 10X
#10 FN. $61 . .88%
#11 VG- $51 1 2X
#12 VG+ $51 1 2X
#13 VG $51 1 9X

Straight Arrow
#3 NM $400 1 90X

Strange Tales
#107 VG+ . . $26 .. 8%
#110 VF.. . . .$396 . .50%
#110 VG . $80 .46%

#111 GD $29 .74%
#111 VG $53 91%
#115 FN $51 44%
#115 GD $40 1 05X
#115 FN+ $55 48%

Superman
#23 GD $150 1 23X

Tales Of Suspense
#39 FN+ $600 71%
#39 VG . $315 56%
#39 GD+ . $280 Guide
#39 GD- $250 89%
#41 VG+ $65 60%
#58 FN $61 76%

Tales To Astonish
#60 FN $40 80%

Thor
#164 VF $10 71%

Western
#1 VF ... $625 .. 1 5X
#9 NM (MH) $640 4X

What If?
#31 NM $14 1 16X

World's Finest
#226 NM $10 59%

X-Men
#3 GD+ $45 .92%
#12 VF $219 Guide
#13 VF $80 50%
#20 VF $66 81%
#29 VF $60 99%
#98 VF $198 1 34X
#39 VF $24 53%
#41 NM $61 94%
#46 NM $40 62%
#57 NM $46 77%
#61 NM $46 77%
#84 FN $10 1 33X
#105 NM $31 89%

Yellow Jacket
#5 VG $58 85%
#7 FN $84 64%
#8 VG+ $60 Guide

involved in through the ether of on-line communication. Seems it was important to experience the tactile dimensions they desired to immerse themselves in three dimensions with all the flavors of fandom and tactile collecting.

We watched fellow dealers surrounded by shoppers throughout the four days of the con. We were so busy I sacrificed my few opportunities to be a fanboy to remain at our booth to help with sales and questions. There I watched comic books of all grades and prices move from our tables. Common Silver Age comics in those hard-to-move mid-grades sold repeatedly. It's clear that in this new marketplace environment every comic book had the potential to find a home. We left the show secure in the knowledge that we had developed new customers and a stronger customer base.

We just want to conclude by saying that this particular show left us with the impression that the comic book market has turned a corner for dealers and collectors. The sales implosion of the mid-'90s may be dead and buried. Buyers are showing a savvy that was not so prevalent six years ago. Combined with a new eagerness to own, collectors are demonstrating a willingness to spend money on comic books for investment AND for entertainment. This new "attitude" from collectors is reinvigorating a marketplace.

On a personal note, I want to thank Michael Naiman, Gary Carter and the other members of the AACC for a memorable evening at the EC Reunion dinner Paying tribute to the EC talent of the past and listening to the guests speak was a moving experience for everyone

Finally, getting to see legendary greats such as Jack Davis, Al Wi liamson, Jack Kamen, Marie Severin, Will Elder, Angelo Torres, Al Feldstein, and the others was both exciting and touching Having our name and store immortalized in the EC tribute book for all time is a dream come true

A few sample sales include Avengers #1 FN $500; Detective #37 PR/FR $160, #76 FN+ $440; Fantastic Four #12 VG/FN $250; Hulk #181 VF- $275; Mary Marvel #12 VG/FN (Mile High) $200, X-Men #94 VG $90

STEVE FISHLER & VINCENT ZURZOLO
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There was a definite dichotomy between San Diego and Chicago. On the West Coast we were inundated every minute of the show by seriously interested buyers. and we broke all previous convention sales records at San Diego. I am very happy to report many of my friends including Highgradecomics.com, Comic Box Productions, and Jaster Collectibles also recorded their best shows ever In Chicago the pendulum swung the other way as I was buried under a deluge of offers from excited sellers I do not remember the last time I was able to buy so much quality material at a show. The three factors that have brought us to this increased surge in activity include: the X-Men Movie, the continuing success of the eBay marketplace, and the ever-increasing demand for CGC graded material.

The promoters at both shows should not be forgotten and the ComiCon International and Wizard World staff should be commended on the job they did. In both cases the shows were run in a very professional manner

The highlight of the convention circuit for me was being asked to speak at a grading symposium hosted by the AACC. Collectors from around the world asked questions about restoration, grading, pricing and CGC graded material. I would like to thank the AACC for inviting me and also praise them for the wonderful EC Dinner Tribute they held. I only realized afterward that it would probably be the last time so many of the original writers and artists of EC would be in the same room .. at the same time. The awards ceremony was both heart-warming and comical and I will remember it for a very long time.

JOE & NADIA MANNARINO
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This year at San Diego can be described in one word .. WOW! We haven't seen a crush of people like this in a few years Both old and new collectors abounded. We had our third SimulCon auction during the show It proved to be another big success. Original art leed the way followed by slabbed CGC books.

We got the distinct feeling that there are many new players in the original art market. They could be divided into two groups. Group one would be the newly wealthy with large disposable incomes and group two would be characterized as those com.c book collectors who have filled in their runs and are looking to diversify with examples of original comic art

Some com.c sales Fantastic Four #48 CGC NM 9 4 $1,675; Giant Size X-Men #1 CGC VF/NM 9.0 $710; and Hulk #181 (CGC 9.4) $1,351. Some original art sales. Neal Adams, Batman #299 cover (15" x 10"-1970) $6,550, Steve Ditko, Tales to Astonish #67 splash (1964) $2,455; Heath, Showcase #72 cover $2,025; Herriman, Krazy Cat Sunday (12/23/17) $6,766; McFarlane, Spider-Man #322 Pg #8 (15" x 17") $2,950; Kubert, Our Army at War #133 Pg #4 (18" x 22") $370; Marge's Little Lulu 4 panel two color (6/26/43) $499, Wood, cover to Daredevil #8 $17,500.

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Busy sales at San Diego this year The place was packed! It was difficult to leave the table because of all the crowds. More time for editorializing the next time around… here are some sales!

All American Western #125 (with the #125 showing on the cover) VG Toth $40 (Steve Fears bought this one—probably perked by Gary Carter's two page editorial); Atomic War #1 FN- $200, Batman #92 FN+ first Bat Hound $200; Beanbags #2 VG+ $30, Christmas with Mother Goose 4C #172 VG Kelly $35, Four Color #103 (Easter with Mother Goose) FN+ $65, #185 VG $30 (both by Kelly).

Intrigue #1 GD/VG (Jack Cole, scarce last Quality pre Code, 1955) $50; Joker Comics #10 VG (Wolverton) $95; Jumbo #48 VG+ $90, #56 FN- $85, #104 VG+ Baker $40, Fractured Fairy Tales #1 FN $100; Frontier Fighters #8 VG+ (Kubert) $100, Gorgo #1 FN Ditko $150, Land of the Lost #8 VG $35; Four Color #68 (Mother Goose and Nursery Rhymes) FN+ $100

Mystery Tales #21 VG Matt Fox $25, Porky Pig's Duck Hunt Sealfield #2178 FN- (first app Daffy Duck) $300; Scooby Doo #3 VF $25, #5, 8, & 11 all VF $20@ (scarce 1975 Charltons); Sheena #1 pulp FN 1951 $200, Showcase #22 VG (GL) $300; Skeleton Hand #5 VG ACG $50, South Seas #2 FN- $400, Superman #53 VG $250, True Crime #2 VG- Jack Cole $400; World of Fantasy #1 VG+ $100, #3 VG $48; World of Mystery #1 VG $80, # 2 and 4 VG+ $50 each; World of Suspense #31 VG+ $100

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I recently went to the San Diego Comic Convention—not as a dealer, but simply to enjoy the show And, it was enjoyable It was very interesting reviewing the wares of the multitude of dealers who set up at the show Slabbed and graded CGC books were in abundance Most of those looked reasonably graded but naturally, with such a subjective art as grading, there definitely were some books that appeared to me to be optimistically graded. I should also point out that there also looked to be some that were very conservatively graded—these were typically books with some form of NM appellation

The true enjoyment of the San Diego Con for me was the American Association of Comic-book Collectors (AACC) annual dinner meeting This year's event *(Continued on page 72)*

Data vs. Hype?

How does a person sort through all of the conflicting market information, on-line results, and price data? On one hand, I feel like I'm preaching to the choir since you're a loyal CBM reader… but on the other hand, even a few of the enlightened are looking to make sense of this new marketplace.

And can you blame them? Many, many multiples for easy-to-find CGC books, wholesale reversal of the Western and photo cover market, and a renewed passion for high grade Silver Age. Wow, how things change almost overnight! But in an environment filled to the brim with BOTH real market data and market hype, it has never been more important to do your homework! If you want to play the "game" make sure you're not the one being "played."

Golden Age: Holding steady (more than most) is Golden Age mainstream superhero titles. Low grade DC is catching up to the low grade Timely books, but with a much larger pool of material to pick from. Pre-Code Detectives and Actions lead the way and the demand looks like it will continue through the Fall season. A pleasant surprise is the renewed demand for Fawcett Marvel Family titles, with issues of Captain Marvel Jr. sporting Raboy covers leading the way. There's also a resurgence of interest in the Dick Tracy books.

Golden Age Sales: Batman #48 GD $140, #50 GD $125; Dick Tracy #17 FN $60, #8 GD $45; Flash Comics #33 GD $170; Four Color #34 FN $165; Leading Comics #1 FN $950; Mystery Men #2 GD $275; Science Comics #4 VG+ $375; Shadow V5#2 GD $50; Taffy #11 FN $65; US Marines #2 VF $150.

Atomic Age: We see a lot of high grade Gold and Silver coming out of late, but where are the high grade Good Girl, Horror, and Romance? Many are pondering… is it tougher to find a VF+ Batman #7 or Jo-Jo #8? Conventional wisdom is being stood on its head as collectors are realizing that most Atom Age is so hard to find in grade and generally still undervalued in the Guide. Atom Age War books (from any publisher) are rapidly gaining in popularity after a long "dry spell" as seasoned collectors are rediscovering titles and artists that have been overlooked for 25 years. Also Western photo covers, long seen as less-than-Guide sellers, are bringing closer to Guide prices on a regular basis.

Atomic Age Sales: Best Love #33 FN $88; Confessions of Romance #7 FN/VF $110; Dagar #20 FN $155; Dynamic #25 FN $180; Four Color #282 GD $34; Ghost #4 VG $69; GI Combat #44 GD $75; Great Action #9 FN $65; Marvels of Science #1 GD/VG $38; Mister Mystery #12 FR $178; War Action #3 NM- $80; War Battles #1 GD $22; Warfront #12 VF/NM $70.

Silver Age: Trying to track the sometimes-radical fluctuations of the high grade Silver Marvel market has been a truly challenging task over the past six months. Between the CGC-slabbed books, and the Manning and Sotheby's auctions, prices for high grade books have literally skyrocketed. Take a look on eBay on any given day, and witness the carnage! Gambling collectors/investors are busy trying to scoop up the DCs (especially Batman) and other keys before the market "catches on" to the trend. It may already be too late for the average collector to find any room on the ground floor as prices seem to suggest we are in the upswing for DC.

Also some prominent collectors who specialize in Silver material have reported that they feel 1960's squarebounds are being consistently overgraded by both dealers and grading services… with the most problematic area being the spines of otherwise nice looking books. They feel that graders are almost ignoring the spine defects (so common in 1960's squarebounds) and not weighting them enough in the determination of the final grade. The one exception is the American Association of Comicbook Collectors (AACC) grading committee whose system does appropriately take them into account. It just points out what seasoned collectors have known for years… and that is truly high grade early '60's Marvel and DC Annuals are extremely rare!

Silver Age Sales: Amazing Spider-Man #25 NM $450, #42 VF $75; Bat Lash #1 NM+ $55; Batman #153 VF/NM $135, #139 FN $85; Brave & Bold #34 VF/VF+ $1,950; Four Color #1270 FN $90; Showcase #58 FN $45; Unexpected #40 GD $120; X-Men #1 GD $685.

Bronze Age: Can pedigree Bronze Age bring multiples of Guide? So far the answer is yes, even with plenty of high grade material from most other eras coming out. Marvel Horror in high grade is receiving the most attention right now, with Our Army at War and Star Spangled War Stories not too far behind. The 48/52 page DC books, Marvel Giant Size, and DC squarebounds continue to bring (sometimes astonishing) multiples. Trying to find these books in true VF or better has become a real chore… and many report having no luck at cons or on mailing lists.

Bronze Age Sales: DC Special Series #3 NM $90; DC Super-Stars #2 VF+ $11; Dudly Do-Right #7 VF/NM $45; Ghosts #1 VF $68; Giant Size Master of Kung Fu #3 FN $8; Giant Size X-Men #1 CGC NM 9.2 $1,150; Green Lantern #90 NM+ $18; Marvel Spotlight #3 NM+ $55; Micronauts Annual #1 NM $9; Mighty Marvel Western #2 VF/NM $28; Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles #1 NM $185; Vampirella Special #1 VF/NM (soft) $220; X-Men #100 NM $98.

Modern (gulp) Age: or "stop the ride, I want to get off!" How do you explain CGC-graded Wolverine #2 for (choke) $61, a CGC-graded Miller's Dark Knight #3 for (gasp) $95… or a CGC-graded Spawn (sputter) #1 for $85? Sure they're nice in shape, but aren't there literally thousands of copies out there in nice shape? I really hope these buyers won't become victims of the "last fool in the chain" theory… 'cause that's bad for the market, and bad for the whole hobby!

honored the 50th anniversary of EC's new trend and had as honored guests most of the surviving EC writers, artists, and editors. It was a pleasure to see and meet such people as Jack Davis, Bill Elder, Al Feldstein, Jack Kamen, Marie Severin, Angelo Torres, and Al Williamson. Most of these famous people were genuinely touched by the display of affection and gratitude evident among all the fans in attendance. I highly recommend that everyone consider becoming a member of the AACC and supporting this annual dinner event.

Here are a few recent eBay sales: Buccaneers #19(#1) FN- $46.75, #20(#2) FN $28.50, #21(#3) GD/VG $44.53, CBM #3 (2 ad pages missing) $96.20; Marvel Masterworks Vol 15 (Silver Surfer) VF $67, My Secret Marriage IW#9 Looks VF/NM but most spine split $7, Tony Trent #3 VG $10.55, Uncle Scrooge #180 VF $17, #181 VF $31, #182 FN/VF $3.31, #190 NM- $10.50, #191 NM/M $10.50, #192 VF $10.50, #193 NM- $6.50, #201 VF/NM $10.50, #202 VF $10.50, #203 NM $4.25, #204 VF- $5.50, #205 VF $7, #207 FN/VF$10.50.

It was interesting that the Buccaneer books with wonderful Crandall art were somewhat overlooked during the bidding!

Collectors should note that the opinions expressed in CBM Market Reports are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Seasoned hobbyists are acutely aware that prices vary based on geographic location, time of year, and a number of other marketplace factors.

NAIMAN REPORT

Continued from page 68

value. Maybe to these speculators, this is just a numbers game like the ups and downs of the stock market. Nothing more. Nothing less.

And how many of these "hot" slabbed books that investors are buying are what collector's would call prime material? How many are Rare and Scarce? Certainly not an Iron Man #1… not Spider-Man #1… not a Hulk #181… and certainly not Spawn #1. Yet record prices continue to be paid for these common books when encapsulated. High grade Marvels from the late 1960s and early 1970s are like a rash… they're everywhere! Find a new collection, give it a name, and investor-types will flock to it… just like their Marvel Zombie relatives of the past. Slab 'em and they will come…!

Will the Mile Highs, White Mountains, and Spokane books end up being slabbed and sold for multiples-of-the-multiples they already bring? I believe you can count on it!

How will this affect valuation in the collectors market? My guess is that it will not affect books that do not fall into the "new and improved" (read watered down) "Near Mint and above" range. Several at the show were only looking for "9.4 or better" books. Seems that's what they've have been "told" to collect by a number of "helpful" high end dealers.

Some collectors have voiced the opinion that there will be no overflow of appreciation in value to other unslabbed books because people who buy less than NM books know what they are really worth. Investors do not buy these books. They only want what they perceive to be (or what they are told to be) the "best examples" that might currently be available. They can afford them… and so they buy them on spec. The result of this is an upward spiral that will eventually crash down upon itself.

And my final thought is yet another concern I have regarding CGC… the neutrality in grading. I wonder how the identity of the submitter can remain unknown to the grader when the submitting dealer is trumpeting the latest and greatest "pedigree collection" in a fan press release and specifically listing the books they will be submitting to the grading service for encapsulation. How could anyone in the mainstream of the hobby not know who was submitting these books for grading?

The American Association of Comic-book Collectors held a grading symposium on Friday, July 21st during the San Diego ComicCon. We discussed the above topics as well as many others… and in a pleasant informal forum that reflected an excellent cross-section of the hobby. Invited to participate on the panel were people from all areas of the collecting field. Well-attended by many who wanted to learn about grading techniques, an in-depth and informative discussion was held, but, curiously absent from the event was a CGC representative. Although they were invited and encouraged to attend (more than 30 days before the event), they said at the last minute that they were "too busy" to help answer inquires from collectors (and potential users of their service) about their methods. Too bad… it would have been a great opportunity for CGC to discuss their services. Regrettably, many questions went unanswered.

One of the questions posed at the symposium had to do with the archival safety of all encapsulations, devices and methods. Although no one had any definitive information at the time, we've set up a test to help fandom sort it all out. Look for a detailed analysis (by a professional testing lab) of CGC's encapsulation device, the Pedrin Fortress, and the AACC "sealed grading" method in an upcoming CBM report. The analysis will compare the archival quality of all materials used and give you, dear CBM reader, the straight scoop on the relative safety of these methods. I'll be interested to see which approach is the most archivally safe.

One final note… CBMer Jeff Luman reported that he recently auctioned six issues of the nine issue run of Marvel's Linda Carter Student Nurse on eBay and got some curious results: #1 FN $103.50 (Guide is $11.40 that's about 9x Guide!!!), #2 GD/VG- $15.50 (Guide is $5), #4 VG $10.40 (Guide is $5.60), #6 VG+ $13.09 (Guide is $6.75), #8 VG $10.05 (Guide is $5.60), #9 GD+ $4.75 (Guide is $3.25). This and other above Guide sales suggests that this title is on the move.

Back at you next month with another Naiman Report.

Continued from page 12

after reading dozens and dozens of regular size books, what a treat to read the first annuals, full of double book length stories, pinups, etc.

Also, by late 1963, the Avengers had arrived. At this point there was really only one other team, the X-Men being as new as the Avengers, so just the FF. So Marvel fans are following the adventures of Thor, Iron Man, Giant-Man and the Wasp. Torch aside because he's in a team, you have the new Dr. Strange, who's too other-worldly to have in any team in those days before Steve Gerber. Spider-Man is a possibility to have on a team, except that when Lee puts the question to Marveldom, the overwhelming consensus is to keep him a loner.

So when Lee needs a team like the JLA, what characters does he have in the stable to draw upon? Whereas the FF and X-Men are homogenous, having similar origins and reasons d'être, you could not imagine a more offbeat combination of heroes than a legendary Norse god, a scientist in an armoured suit, and a duo who talks to bugs. Nevertheless there's simply no one else in the Marvel stable to call upon. "Oh yeah, who's that green guy we tossed away months ago? The Heap? No, no, the Hulk. Yeah, that's it, the Hulk. What the heck. Let's throw him in too."

I can get a sense of the excitement that the kids back in the '60s must have felt when reading these early Avengers. Apart from the FF and X-Men, this is the only team book. And I don't have to buy three other books to follow my favourite heroes. Here they are all in the same book! Crossovers at this point are virtually nonexistent, so what a blast to get all these heroes together, squabbling of course in that new Marvel Age style.

Now the Hulk was obviously too unpredictable to work in a team setting, so Lee needed another hero to provide the glue for this odd group. Is it possible that he actually went hunting into the Golden Age of heroes and decided to resurrect Captain America solely for the purpose of filling out the Avengers? Interesting thought for conjecture.

Other little snippets of interest: the final fantasy tale of pre-Marvel days appeared in JIM #101, cover date February 1964, around the same time that Lee began to have fun with his "crazy credits," (When will he sleep) Lee, (When will he eat) Heck, (When will he learn to spell) Simek. Notice in X-Men #4, the ad for the cover to Spidey #11, which is altered from the actual Spidey #11!!

Finally, as I read through the universe, in early 1965 there is a strong sense of the end of an "innocent" age, when the Marvel heroes fought burglars, and kooky villains with animal names. With the changeover in the Avengers roster, the appearance of the Juggernaut, and the Sentinels, the death of Pam Hawley, and other more epic struggles in various titles, Lee and company started taking the stories to new heights. Finally, when reading every title as they appeared, one can really appreciate that renowned Marvel continuity between titles.

I've rambled on much too long, but I wanted to share with fellow collectors the idea that reading several company titles simultaneously gives one an interesting perspective and hindsight on the excitement of those books in the way and the order in which they came out originally.

Kevin McSheffrey, Ontario, Canada.

Gerber stickers

Just love CBM and am anxious to get it and read it every month. Keep up the good work! I like the fact that you have listed the Gerber white spaces along with noting those covers that readers have helped you acquire for publishing as stickers at some point. What would be helpful for me, and I suppose for other fans, is if you also noted those stickers/spaces that you have already published, alongside somehow. What do you think? Thanks,

Steve Mauger, via E-mail

Thanks Gil Kane

You have put out some really good issues of CBM, e.g. #71 which had that Lamont Larsen article, and #74 which had a brilliant 11-page conversation with Gil Kane—I actually read it twice over a four month period.

We owe both Robert J. McKinnon and Gil Kane a sense of gratitude. Mr. Kane may have gone but his comments on himself and the other artists made me fully realize for the first time that we were in the presence of a great artist all these years gone by… his comments on Jack Kirby made me stand up and take notice—I would have to elevate him with the likes of Neal Adams and Jack Kirby, such was the impression Gil Kane had on me.

CBM #79 was another great issue especially because of that candid conversation with the legendary Fred Guardineer—it was more than just a very good read because it shows just how Frank Donenfeld took over the Major's three real comic books: New Fun, Adventure, and Detective, which led to Bob Kane and Siegel & Shuster and therefore the beginning of what a giant DC would become shortly.

I also like Michelle Nolan's very involved letter to the editor re: Steve Cooper's article about his April 1956 collection.

I notice a Dutch person wrote stating that he would like to know much more than previously written about Matt Baker… it so happens I feel exactly the same way he does.

On another note I've read both Special Edition #2 which featured that famous robot cover, and the recent Wonder Woman issue of CBM because I particularly liked those panels. I read both issues cover to cover. So thanks to all concerned who helped make up those issues.

G. F. Stockdale, NSW, Australia

Help!

Does any CBM reader have a copy of All-Star Western #72 that you would be willing to scan for me? It's the last one I need to complete the set. I've searched everywhere for copies, and no one seems to have this comic for sale. There are at least ten of us that have been searching for this comic for more than a year. Please let me know via CBM if you can help.

Gene Reed, Alabama

Ditko's co-creator credits

As per our conversation at your San Diego booth, please find enclosed Stan Lee's own words acknowledging that Steve Ditko is the co-creator of Spider-Man.

I've been following CBM since #16 and genuinely enjoy the magazine. However, I am bothered by numerous instances where acknowledged co-creator situations are still treated as solo achievements.

To me, it's not a matter of choosing sides and building up one collaborator over another. It was a combination of talents that created and sustained the work. Neither side can or should claim it all. By utilizing accurate co-creator credits, no one is denied their due. Each collaborator would be given equal reverence and public acclaim. That's simply a more realistic approach than promoting any participant as a one man band.

It's exasperating to read some newspaper account where an individual is given all the credit while his collaborator(s) seem completely unworthy of mention. It's worse in comic-related publications that definitely should know and act better. Incidentally, I don't single out CBM here.

Many or most have chosen their particular favorite, blindly singing his praises at the expense of his former partner(s)

I don't think anything less of the Siegel and Shuster team because it took two of them to get their hero airborne. Why should I begrudge any other artist and writer the same respect? A merging of talents got many Marvel characters off the ground as well. My request is that both sides should be acknowledged

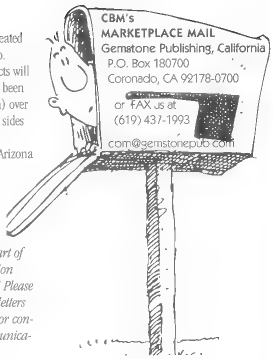
The one-sided acclaim is especially baffling considering the so-called "Marvel method." Working from an initial plot, the artist added elements and paced the work. Later, finished dialogue was inserted to better match the panel drawings. How can either side claim they did it all? It was a mixture of talents. Why should that be so hard to acknowledge?

The various co-creators all have their partisans. That's fine but personal fondness for any particular individual doesn't retroactively alter his working method or contributions.

It'd make a nice legend that anyone created Marvel alone but the facts don't back it up. Hopefully, from here on in, those same facts will override the exaggerated claims that have been made (and all-too-often accepted on faith) over the years. In a partnership, crediting both sides is simply the right thing to do.

Joe Frank, Arizona

My thanks to everyone who wrote in this time. I look forward to hearing comments and suggestions from CBM readers all over the world. You're all part of the "CBM family" now, and your opinion counts! I hope you'll write or FAX soon! Please note that CBM reserves the right to edit letters selected for publication for length and/or content. If you'd care to write, send communications to:



ELIGIBLE FOR A NO-PRIZE!

Dear CBM,

Years ago, when I was new to comic collecting, I was at the San Diego Convention one summer. It was there that I picked up one of my first Silver Age comics with a single digit issue number... *X-Men* #7. I recall buying it because I was so impressed with that great Kirby art and the cover scenario (the X-Men graduating and Magneto attempting to take over the world from us inferior Homo sapiens).

I looked at the price tag and couldn't believe it, an *X-Men* #7 for only $15! I pulled out my trusty *Overstreet Update* (remember those) and checked the price. Wow, what a bargain! No... wait... I see. It has some writing on the cover. Someone had written some numbers on the top of the comic... and a little wing was drawn on the X in the logo. Oh well, it's cheap, I'll buy it anyway....

Years went by until the other day, while I was digging through my old comics that are usually stuck away in the corner (actually they won't fit in the corner anymore, they take up half the guest room). I'm digging around when I spy my old *X-Men* #7. But wait, upon closer inspection I now see that the wing that I originally thought was drawn on the cover by some amateur artist was actually *printed* on the cover! I felt the discovery made me eligible for a "no-prize!"

I immediately grabbed my *Gerber Photo-Journal* (Volumes 3 and 4) to look at the rest of the *X-Men* covers. Did other issues also have this mysterious wing on the cover? Issue #6 doesn't... #8 doesn't, #5 doesn't... Lo and behold... only the #7's got it!

But what's this on this cover of *X-Men* #3? Angel is swooping across the cover... and his wing tip is drawn right into the "X" of the logo! The things you can miss the first half a dozen times you look.

I hypothesized a moment. They obviously copied the logo from #3 to 7, the question is why that issue? Well, one possible answer that came to mind is that both of these issues (3 and 7) sport Blob covers. Perhaps they were using the #3 as a reference, copied the logo, and forgot to white out the little wing tip. And there's a second possibility... the logo changed from issue #2 to 3. Maybe they just kept copying the logo over and over and again forgot to white out the wing tip.

I'd be interested in knowing what other Marvel collectors think about this small error. I'd also be interested in knowing if other collectors have noticed (and would be willing to share) any other Silver Age Marvel anomalies.

Richard M. Holley, California

Captain BILL
By Ron Kasman
SO, DO YOU WANT THE COMIC?
OF COURSE I WANT IT BUT I'LL NEVER FIND THE TWENTY-SIX DOLLARS.
JIM, IF YOU CAN AFFORD THIS HOUSE, YOU CAN AFFORD THE COMIC...
IT'LL MAKE YOU HAPPY.
I CAN AFFORD THIS HOUSE BECAUSE I DON'T BUY THESE COMICS.
I OWNED THIS COMIC TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO BUT MINE WAS BEATEN UP AND, I THINK MISSING A CORNER.
SIDNEY GLANCED AT HIS WATCH. THE SALE NOT MADE HE WAS READY TO LEAVE.
STILL, JIM WAS HIS UNCLE. HIS MOTHER WOULD WANT HIM TO BE POLITE. SO HE SHIFTED IN THE CHAIR AND ASKED..
WHAT DID YOU GET WHEN YOU SOLD IT?
MAYBE A BUCK.
A BUCK!
TALES TO ASTONISH
maybe fifty cents.
IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.
I OWNED ALL THE MARVEL FIRST ISSUES EXCEPT FOR FANTASTIC FOUR #1.
WHAT HAPPENED TO 'EM?
© 2000 B. KASMAN

I SOLD THEM... ALL THE KIRBY AVENGERS, THE FIRST FIFTY SPIDERMANS, AMAZING FANTASY #15, AND DOZENS OF OTHER KEY ISSUES
I GOT PEANUTS ... FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS, TOPS.
BAD MOVE.
I SEE IT A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY. THOSE WERE 1971 DOLLARS SO QUADRUPLE THE FIGURE. AND LET'S REMEMBER THERE WERE NO COMIC BAGS OR PRICE GUIDES THEN.
MOST OF THE COMICS WERE TORN, BEAT UP AND TAPED.
SELL JUNK LIKE THAT TODAY AND SEE WHAT YOU GET...
THE GENTLE SCENT OF GINGER REMINDED JIM TO TURN OFF THE OVEN. SOON, HIS WIFE WOULD BE HOME FOR SUPPER.
BUT MOST IMPORTANT THAT FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS HELPED TO PAY FOR MY EDUCATION.
I LEARNED TO DRAW AND TODAY I DESIGN FURNITURE CATALOGUES FOR A LIVING. THOSE COMICS INSPIRED ME TO DRAW THEN THEY PAID FOR MY INSTRUCTION
AND THEY WERE GREAT STORIES!
THAT'S WHY I LOVE THEM SO MUCH.
CAN YOU BELIEVE ALL THAT?
SURE! WHY NOT!
BECAUSE I'M NOT SURE IF I BELIEVE IT MYSELF.
SOMETIMES I THINK THAT HAD I USED THOSE OLD COMICS TO LINE A BIRDCAGE I'D RATIONALIZE THAT TOO.
ANYWAY, IT'S ALMOST SUPPERTIME. WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US?
THANKS OLD BOY, BUT I'VE GOT TO BE GOING SOON. MY GIRLFRIEND IS MAKING SUPPER FOR ME.
YOU'VE GOT A GIRLFRIEND? THAT'S NICE SIDNEY.
...CALL YOU NEXT WEEK, JIM...
BYE SIDNEY.

I'VE CLEANED UP THE CRUMBS, FLUFFED THE PILLOWS AND TURNED OFF THE STOVE. JENNIE'S NOT HOME AND SUPPER WILL WAIT.
JIM SET OUT FOR SOME EXERCISE, CRUISING ALONG QUIET, SAFE ROADS...
FRESH PAVEMENT! I'LL CUT DOWN HERE.
JIM HADN'T EXPLORED THE STREET BEFORE. NEAR THE CORNER HE SAW...
CAPTAIN BILL'S?
WHAT'S THAT IN THE WINDOW?
Les Bakery
D BAKED ON PREMISES
HE MOVED CLOSER, PEEKING AROUND A SAPLING MAPLE...
HOW COULD I HAVE MISSED THIS PLACE?
SUPPER WILL JUST HAVE TO WAIT A LITTLE LONGER!
JIM PUT THE ROLLERBLADES IN HIS KNAPSACK AND WALKED IN ALONG CREAKY FLOORBOARDS.
CIGARETTE SMOKE FILLED THE AIR.
BEHIND THE DUST-COVERED DESK SAT A MAN IN WORN, FADED CLOTHING...
CASH
BILL?

MY FRIENDS CALL ME Captain BILL...
JIM MARVELLED AT THE STACKS OF PAPER SURROUNDING BILL LIKE OLD FRIENDS.
BEFORE HE COULD ENQUIRE ABOUT THE FANTASTIC FOUR #1 BILL ANNOUNCED..
IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN THE WINDOW DISPLAY IT'S JUST THE GOLDEN RECORD REPRINT.
JIM WAS DISAPPOINTED BUT REMAINED CURIOUS...
WHAT ELSE YOU GOT?
SEE FOR YOURSELF.
HE TURNED TO SEE BILL'S STOCK ARRANGED LIKE ALL BUT FORGOTTEN CASTOFFS IN AN OVERCROWDED ATTIC!
PARKLE
MILK BOTTLES, TRAIN SETS, DOLLS, MAGAZINES, VINYL RECORDS, POSTERS, LUNCH BOXES...
CAPRICORN
MONOPOLY
IT'S NOT THE SAME STOCK THEY HAVE AT THE COMIC STORES, IT'S OLD AND WORN.
JIM SAW A STACK OF SIX OLD, TORN MARVEL COMICS...
ONE WAS FANTASTIC FOUR #6.
HEY- I USED TO OWN THIS COMIC!
HOW MUCH FOR THESE?
PRICES ARE ON PAGE ONE.
THE TOTAL WAS $9.25 --ABOUT WHAT JIM COULD HAVE SOLD THEM FOR IN 1971...
ONCE JIM HAD PAID FOR THE COMICS, BILL GOT OUT HIS FANZINE.
CAPTAIN BILL'S WHIRLWIND-- ALEX RAYMOND REPRINTS--35¢
IN THE SHADOWS THE COINS LOST THEIR ZINC GLOSS AND LOOKED DULL GREY-- LIKE TARNISHED SILVER.
JIM BLADED HOME AS THRILLED AS A CHILD WITH NEW COMICS BOUGHT IN A VARIETY STORE...

HE SHOWED THE HAUL TO JENNIE WHO TRIED TO LOOK ENTHUSIASTIC...
YOU USED TO DRAW LIKE THIS BACK IN ART SCHOOL...
...WHY DID YOU STOP?
PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS DON'T DRAW IN THEIR SPARE TIME.
AFTER SUPPER HE PHONED SIDNEY WHO RUSHED OVER.
I'M SURE THEY'RE LOSS LEADERS
HE PROBABLY PUTS OUT A FEW A WEEK TO GET PEOPLE INTO HIS STORE.
MINT THEY'D BE WORTH OVER A THOU.
AND IN THIS CONDITION?
MAYBE FORTY RETAIL BUT THEY COULD SIT IN A STORE FOR YEARS! YOU GOT A GOOD DEAL -- PRICED TO MOVE.
THIS FANTASTIC FOUR COULD BE WORTH A THOU BY ITSELF.
HOWEVER, IN THIS CONDITION YOU'D HAVE TROUBLE GETTING TWENTY.
BUT I DO KNOW ONE COLLECTOR WHO'D GIVE YOU FIFTY -- MAYBE MORE.
I DON'T THINK SO SIDNEY. I REGRET HAVING SOLD THIS ISSUE YEARS AGO -- I DON'T WANT TO MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE AGAIN... THANKS FOR THINKING OF ME THOUGH.
HEY, WE'RE FAMILY...
WHY DON'T YOU GIVE ME THE ADDRESS OF THE PLACE
I'LL STOP BY.
I WON'T TOUCH THE STUFF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN...
I'M INTERESTED IN THE COMICS SIDNEY. SO ARE YOU.
I WON'T TOUCH ANY COMICS, I SWEAR!
NOT UNLESS I GET YOUR PERMISSION...
AND I WON'T GIVE THE ADDRESS TO ANYONE ELSE.
IT'LL BE OUR LITTLE SECRET.
DO YOU THINK IT'S STILL OPEN?
TO KEEP PEACE IN THE FAMILY, JIM RELENTED.
WITHIN ONE MINUTE SIDNEY WAS ON HIS BIKE AND GONE...

THAT EVENING JIM'S PHONE RANG...
I COULDN'T FIND THE STREET!
JIM EXPLAINED THE DIRECTIONS AGAIN...
ARE YOU SURE YOU GOT THE NAME RIGHT? IT'S NOT IN THE PHONE BOOK.
DID YOU TRY THE OPERATOR?
I DID! THEY NEVER HEARD OF IT.
THEN MAYBE I'M NOT REMEMBERING THE EXACT NAME...
MEN
COME OVER AND I'LL TAKE YOU THERE.
SEE YOU SOON...
HALF AN HOUR LATER THE PHONE RANG AGAIN...
MY TIRE BLEW.
WE'LL TRY TOMORROW.
BUT THE NEXT DAY JIM HAD TO WORK LATE.
THE DAY AFTER JIM HAD AN UNEXPECTED VISIT FROM HIS FLIN FLON'IN-LAWS.
SIDNEY SPOKE OUT, CONVINCED THAT JIM WAS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP THE ADDRESS...
NO, IT'S JUST BAD LUCK--
I STILL SAY YOU'RE NOT PLAYING FAIR!
BUT WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO GIVE IT TO YOU?
I DON'T OWE YOU ANYTHING.
AND YOU SOUND TOO UPSET FOR A MAN WHO SAYS HE JUST WANTS A CHEAP COPY OF THE SATURDAY EVENING POST!
JIM HIT THE MARK. IT WOULD BE A LONG TIME BEFORE SIDNEY WOULD MENTION THE STORE AGAIN.
WILL SIDNEY GET THE ADDRESS?
WILL JIM BUILD UP HIS COLLECTION?
AND WHO IS CAPTAIN BILL--?
find out in the NEXT exciting issue of

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